



(Maghrebarab.org, 2019)<sup>1</sup>

## Regionalism in North Africa: the Arab Maghreb Union in 2019

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<sup>1</sup> Taïeb Baccouche, Secretary General of the AMU.

<sup>2</sup> <http://umaghrebarabe.org/fr/le-traite-de-marrakech/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

## Summary

*On the occasion of the thirtieth anniversary of the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), this contribution discusses the state of play since its creation. This desire is all the more motivated by the fact that many events have taken place since the beginning of year 2019. On one hand, set aside at the signing of the Marrakech Treaty, the conflict over the Western Sahara is one of the situations that makes the AMU inoperable. On the other, the lack of stable state institutions in Libya does not allow the country to put the AMU as a top priority in its political agenda. Finally, since the departure of Abdelaziz Bouteflika, in power for 20 years, Algeria is currently in a transition period, while presidential elections are scheduled in Tunisia and Mauritania, in November and June 2019 respectively.*

*This report analyses the AMU from three perspectives: political, economic and cultural. In Chapter 1, the report addresses the historical roots of the AMU and the reasons behind its failure before providing an overview of the current situation. While the AMU founding fathers envisaged an Union which would ultimately lead to a space for peace and unity, the conflict over the Western Sahara makes this idea compromised. In Chapter 2, the report assesses the economic situation of the AMU Member States and examines the benefits which could derive from the achievement of the AMU. The AMU countries crucially lack economic complementarity, which in turn jeopardises intra-regional trade and the project of an integrated market. Finally, Chapter 3 identifies the cultural roots of the Arab Maghreb and the extent to which culture could be used as the primary means to bring each country's populations closer. Because the AMU countries speak Arabic and share similar cultural and religious practices, there is a real potential for cooperation between them.*

*Throughout the research process, this report collected a number of primary data, namely from the Arab Maghreb Union, the African Development Bank, the International Monetary Fund and the United Nations Security Council. Conclusions are drawn that, in spite of current political challenges in the region, the AMU countries would highly benefit from regional integration, namely in terms of economic development and regional cohesion.*

## Introduction

Last February, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) celebrated its thirtieth anniversary. In 1989, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia signed the Marrakech Treaty, which establishes the AMU and provides a momentum for the realisation of a “viable union”<sup>2</sup>. The Marrakech Treaty provides for the need for an effective cooperation in political, economic and cultural spheres and a continuous complementarity in various fields, including natural and strategic resources<sup>3</sup>. Indeed, on one hand, Algeria and Libya have abundant oil resources and Mauritania is naturally endowed with minerals. On the other, Tunisia and Morocco have made efforts for the development of their financial and industrial sectors<sup>4</sup>. Various sectoral committees have worked in an attempt to progressively establish a free-trade area, involving free movement of goods, a customs union and new common management instruments, such as the unification of customs tariffs and the elaboration of unified policies. These last instruments aimed at defining the common rules to allow the implementation of a system of economic regulation in the region<sup>5</sup>. Nevertheless, the Maghreb countries face different challenges, which currently jeopardise the future developments of the AMU.

The political integration of the Maghreb remains the biggest challenge. The main reason behind this is the long lasting tensions between Algeria and Morocco over the Western Sahara. It seems that mistrust and hostility are at the core of the relations between the two Maghreb countries since the Sands War in 1963. For instance, the year 1994 was marked by terrorist attacks in Marrakech, and the Moroccan authorities accused Algeria of being responsible for these attacks. As a result, Morocco unilaterally imposed an entry visa to Algerian citizens. The Algerian authorities responded by closing their borders. Although the 2005 meeting between President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, former president of Algeria, and the King of Morocco, Mohammed VI, led to the cancellation of entry visa between the two countries, the border remains closed. And since 1994, no AMU summit was held, leaving the Union unachieved and in a deadlock.

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<sup>2</sup> <http://umaghrebarabe.org/fr/le-traite-de-marrakech/>

<sup>3</sup> Ibid

<sup>4</sup> Lamrani, M. E. (2013), “L’Union du Maghreb ou l’invincible espoir” In: IX I 2013: Dossier: Le Maghreb avec ou sans l’EUROPE? Available here: <https://journals.openedition.org/anneemaghreb/1938>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.algerie1.com/eclairage/la-relance-de-l-union-du-maghreb-arabe-uma-realites-et-perspectives>

Furthermore, the political systems of the five nations are different, which has a great influence on the relations between them: Algeria and Tunisia are republics, Morocco a constitutional monarchy, Mauritania an Islamic republic, and there is no more state in Libya as two governments have been fighting for legitimacy since the 2011 uprisings<sup>6</sup>. In addition to a lack of political integration, the failure of the AMU lies in an unequal economic development<sup>7</sup> as well as distinct foreign policy strategies. The Maghreb countries did not manage to rely on their complementarity, as outlined in the Marrakech Treaty, and this can be seen by the dramatic lack of trade exchanges. While the AMU involves almost 100 million people, the bilateral trade between the Maghreb countries represents less than 15 per cent of the potential total<sup>8</sup>.

Despite these challenges, a number of high-level events took place in the past two years, which has reshuffled the old dynamics and could lead to new policy outcomes for the future of the AMU. Firstly, the United Nations (UN) have organised two round tables discussions about the disputed Western Sahara with all the parties involved: Mauritania, Algeria, Morocco and the Polisario front. The second round table was organised in line with the provisions adopted in 2018 and set out in Resolution 2440 of the UN Security Council, as an additional step in the search for a fair and mutually acceptable solution<sup>9</sup>. In addition, the Personal Envoy of the UN Secretary-General for Western Sahara, Horst Köhler, has already suggested a third round table. Secondly, on November 6 2018, on the occasion of the 43<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the Green March, King Mohammed VI called on Algeria for a dialogue in order to appease the situation by proposing the creation of a “joint political mechanism for dialogue and consultation”<sup>10</sup>.

Thirdly, in late November 2018, Algeria affirmed its willingness to reactivate the AMU by calling upon the Secretary General of the AMU, Taïeb Baccouche, for the organisation of a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers<sup>11</sup>. This came after the African Union (AU) summit on 17 and 18 November, during which close attention was paid to the role of regional economic blocs in the integration process of African countries<sup>12</sup>. In the absence of a direct and official answer, this could

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<sup>6</sup> <https://maroc-diplomatique.net/le-maroc-pourrait-accueillir-les-chefs-detats-des-pays-du-maghreb-en-2019/>

<sup>7</sup> Ibid

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20190228-the-arab-maghreb-union-that-never-was/>

<sup>9</sup> <https://allafrica.com/stories/201903250599.html>

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.france24.com/fr/20181107-algerie-maroc-roi-marche-verte-mohammed-VI-polisario-sahara>

<sup>11</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/lalgerie-saisit-le-sg-de-luma-pour-une-reunion-du-conseil-des-ministres-des-affaires-etrangees\\_mg\\_5bf6a5d9e4b03b230f9f2e07](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/lalgerie-saisit-le-sg-de-luma-pour-une-reunion-du-conseil-des-ministres-des-affaires-etrangees_mg_5bf6a5d9e4b03b230f9f2e07)

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.elwatan.com/a-la-une/lalgerie-demande-la-reactivation-de-luma-le-maroc-face-a-ses-contradictions-24-11-2018>

also be interpreted as a follow up on Mohammed VI's request for a "frank and direct" dialogue<sup>13</sup>. Furthermore, one month later, during a round table organised by the Union of workers of the Arab Maghreb on the ability to build a strong Maghreb, Taïeb Baccouche announced that an invitation was sent to the foreign ministers of the AMU member countries for a restricted meeting in Tunis<sup>14</sup>. This invitation was for the preparation of the 7<sup>th</sup> summit of the head of state of the AMU and was accepted by Algeria, Tunisia, Libya and Mauritania<sup>15</sup>. The Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs indicated that his country was disposed to host the 7<sup>th</sup> AMU summit<sup>16</sup>. Twenty-five years after the last AMU summit, it seems that the Maghreb countries are finally ready to engage in the organisation of an effective regional integration. Some of the most pressing issues surrounding the AMU's landscape are currently being discussed, which give hope for the future of the AMU.

Thus, on the occasion of the AMU's thirtieth anniversary, the aim of this contribution will be to assess the extent to which the AMU is still relevant in light of the current regional challenges. Firstly, this paper revisits the history behind the AMU and its current structure and ongoing challenges it faces. Secondly, it will explore the economic perspective of the countries of the AMU, paying close attention to the intra-regional trade, before looking at the cultural identity and legacy, a vital element for an effective integration of the populations of the countries. Finally, some recommendations will be formulated that aim to bring positive momentums to the AMU, and that clearly delineates roles and responsibilities for the actors involved.

## 1. The Lack of Political Will at the Negotiating Table

### 1.1. The Historical Context of the AMU

The idea of a common union among the Maghreb countries can be traced back to the colonial era. Indeed, at that time, the elites of those countries aimed to unify in a spirit of combatting French colonialism<sup>17</sup>. For instance, some movements started to emerge in early 1900s in the Arab Maghreb countries, namely the "Young Tunisians", the "Young Algerians" and the "Young Moroccans", respectively in 1907, 1914 and 1919. In 1915-16, a Committee for the Independence of Algeria and

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<sup>13</sup> Ibid

<sup>14</sup> <http://www.aps.dz/monde/81912-sommet-de-l-uma-les-ministres-des-affaires-etrangeres-convies-a-une-reunion-preparatoire>

<sup>15</sup> [http://www.lapresse.tn/index.php?option=com\\_nationals&task=article&id=156794](http://www.lapresse.tn/index.php?option=com_nationals&task=article&id=156794)

<sup>16</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/union-du-maghreb-arabe-un-sommet-au-maroc-en-2019\\_mg\\_5c0e5453e4b035a7bf5d4736](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/union-du-maghreb-arabe-un-sommet-au-maroc-en-2019_mg_5c0e5453e4b035a7bf5d4736)

<sup>17</sup> Lounnas, D. and Messari, N. (2018), "Algeria-Morocco relations and their impact on the Maghrebi regional system", MENARA Working Papers, n20. Available here: [http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara\\_wp\\_20.pdf](http://www.iai.it/sites/default/files/menara_wp_20.pdf)

Tunisia proposed the establishment of a North African Republic and founded the “Maghreb” review, which approached the question of independence<sup>18</sup>. Similarly, thirty years later, the Committee adopted a charter, which constituted a first step towards the idea of a unified Maghreb. The idea was to find ways to strengthen national struggles and tighten the relations between the constituent movements<sup>19</sup>. In a spirit of a common fight against colonialism, Tunisians, Algerians and Moroccans gathered the Arab Maghreb Congress, which established a permanent organ, the Bureau of the Arab Maghreb in 1947<sup>20</sup>. In January 1948, the Committee launched a manifesto, whereby all member parties pledge to fight for the independence of the Maghreb. For his part, the late president Tunisian Habib Bourguiba wanted to go further and create a North African Union<sup>21</sup>.

This common purpose continued in 1954-5 with the collaboration of the Algerian National Liberation Front and the National Liberation Army, with the Moroccan Army of Liberation. This cooperation lasted even after the independence of Morocco in 1956, when the latter offered its support to the Algerian National Liberation Front together with Tunisia. Moreover, when the French government offered Morocco to give back Tindouf and Bechar to the country, two border cities claimed by Morocco but under French administration, Moroccan authorities refused it. Moreover, in a 1961 agreement, while the King of Morocco Hassan II and the Algerian provisional government acknowledged this border issue, they both accepted to delay its resolution until Algeria was independent<sup>22</sup>. Yet, two years later, the Algerian Prime Minister, Abdelaziz Bouteflika, argued that the 1961 agreement was only a “political compromise”, thus denying its legality, which it considered as “dictated by the imperatives of the War of Independence and therefore could not commit the future of a sovereign Algeria”<sup>23</sup>. This was followed by a military response from the Moroccan authorities, which interpreted Bouteflika’s statement as a betrayal.

In October 1963, King Hassan II attempted to open the dialogue with Algiers in an effort to find compromise and to contain the military conflict. However, the situation worsened and eventually culminated to the so-called “Sands War”. By November 2, the AU negotiated a ceasefire, thus ending the conflict<sup>24</sup>. Both Algeria and Morocco pulled back their troops and released war prisoners. While

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<sup>18</sup> Balta, P. (1990), “Le grand Maghreb: des indépendances à l’an 2000”, Paris : Éditions La Découverte, p. 19

<sup>19</sup> Guechi D.E. (2002), “L’Union du Maghreb arabe Intégration régionale et développement économique”. Available here: [https://www.academia.edu/3242957/LUnion\\_du\\_Maghreb\\_arabe\\_intégration\\_régionale\\_et\\_développement\\_économique](https://www.academia.edu/3242957/LUnion_du_Maghreb_arabe_intégration_régionale_et_développement_économique)

<sup>20</sup> Balta, P. (1990), above cited n17, p. 20

<sup>21</sup> Guechi D.E. (2002), above cited n18

<sup>22</sup> Lounnas, D. and Messari, N. (2018), above cited n16

<sup>23</sup> Ibid

<sup>24</sup> Ibid

the conflict in itself lasted only for one month, a high degree of mistrust and rivalry resulted from it<sup>25</sup>.

In 1964, the first conference of the Maghreb Ministers of Economy took place during which the Maghreb Permanent Consultative Committee (MPCC) was established. The MPCC had three objectives: to develop horizontal exchanges through harmonisation of customs policies; to harmonise Member States' policies in the field of industry, mines, energy, transports and telecommunications; to coordinate the position of the countries with regard to the European Economic Community (EEC).

However, the MPCC did not have any headquarters until 1966, and despite the existence of a Secretary General there was neither a charter nor rules of procedure<sup>26</sup>. As a result of a lack of political will, its role was only consultative and its recommendations were non-binding<sup>27</sup>. Intra-regional trade was low, sectoral coordination was not achieved and the harmonisation of national development plans was delayed<sup>28</sup>.

In 1970, Libya withdrew from the MPCC, while Mauritania acceded in 1975. Meanwhile, the 1974 Djerba Declaration, which aimed to unify Libya and Tunisia, was never implemented because of ideological differences. This led to tense diplomatic relations between the two countries, especially in 1985 with the expulsion of thousands of Tunisians from Libya<sup>29</sup>. The MPCC held seven sessions and its last meeting was in 1975 in Algiers during which the "Maghreb economic cooperation draft agreement" was adjourned. Thus, the Arab Maghreb region was embedded into multiple bilateral conflicts at that time, which also include the conflict between Morocco and Libya about the failed coup of Skhirat and the Tunisia-Libya crisis caused by the Gafsa affair in January 1980. The region was divided between two main axes at the beginning of the 1980s: Algeria, Mauritania and Tunisia signed a treaty of fraternity while Libya and Morocco signed the Oujda Union Treaty in August 1984<sup>30</sup>.

When Chadli Bendjedid became the President of Algeria in 1979, he started a policy of reconciliation with Morocco. This process eventually led to the re-opening of the diplomatic dialogue between the two countries in 1988 and to the first Maghreb summit attended by all the North African countries in

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid

<sup>26</sup> Balta, P. (1990), above cited n17, p. 29

<sup>27</sup> Ibid

<sup>28</sup> Guechi D.E. (2002), above cited n18

<sup>29</sup> Ibid

<sup>30</sup> Ibid

Zeralda. During this summit, a Great Commission in charge of defining the ways and means for the realisation of a Union between the five Arab Maghreb States was set up. The work of this Commission subsequently constituted the AMU's short and medium-term work program. And it was in February 1989 that the Treaty of Marrakech was signed by Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, formally establishing the AMU<sup>31</sup>.

**Graphic 1 – Institutions of the AMU**



The main issue with the establishment of the AMU is that the border issue was not resolved beforehand and this conditioned the future of the Union. The Treaty of Marrakech encompasses a wide range of principles based on a common culture, history and religion, and on the necessity to follow the example of other regional organisations. More importantly, the Charter of the AMU provides for the combination of all States' efforts in all areas and the total coordination of their policies, positions and economic and social options. Yet, the question here is: how to achieve a total "policy" and "position" convergence, while a long-lasting internal conflict opposing two of its members is still ongoing. The underlying problem here was that the conflict was not even mentioned in the charter, as both parties agreed to leave it in the hands of the UN, which, until now, has not been able to solve it.

<sup>31</sup> <https://maghrebarabe.org/fr/historique/>

## 1.2. The Arab Maghreb Union Today

Since the signing of the Marrakech Treaty, six summits have been held with the last dating back to 1994. During these summits, the Council of the Presidency has taken several resolutions such as: the completion of the AMU structures as provided for in the Constitutional Treaty; the adoption of Maghreb Conventions (36 in number<sup>32</sup>) addressing various sectors; and the adoption of the programs of execution of the works initiated by the AMU authorities.

At the beginning of November 2018, on the occasion of the 43rd anniversary of the Green March, King Mohammed VI called on Algeria to engage in a constructive dialogue. He also proposed to create "a joint political mechanism for dialogue and consultation" to improve relations between the two countries. After more than fifteen days without any reaction, Algeria and its president Abdelaziz Bouteflika finally, albeit partially, responded to Morocco during the 63rd anniversary of Morocco's independence and the usual congratulations addressed to the King. Without responding specifically to the request of Mohammed VI, the Algerian president said that he wanted to jointly work with Morocco in order to secure bilateral relations based on mutual respect, in a spirit of progress, development and prosperity<sup>33</sup>. A few days later, Algeria officially called upon the Secretary-General of the Arab Maghreb Union to organise a meeting of the Council of Foreign Ministers of the AMU as soon as possible<sup>34</sup>.

After 14 years of absence, the summit should, this time, take place. In December 2018, during a round table entitled "Capable of building a great Maghreb together", organised by the Arab Maghreb Trade Union, Taïeb Baccouche, Secretary General of the UMA, announced that a correspondence was sent to the ministers of Foreign Affairs of the AMU member countries to invite them to a meeting in Tunis<sup>35</sup>. An appointment proposed in preparation for the 7th Summit of the Heads of State of the AMU, planned in 2019. Taïeb Baccouche said that Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia have accepted this invitation, stating that each of these countries have expressed the wish to host the AMU Council of Foreign Ministers. According to Baccouche, the Moroccan foreign

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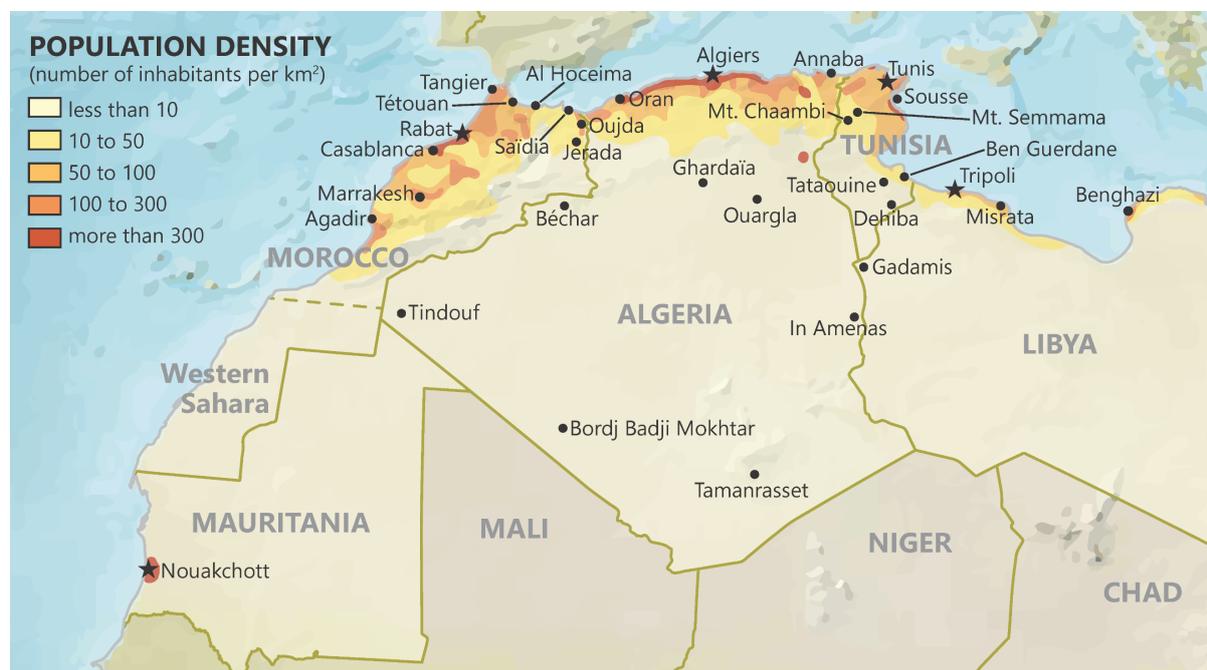
<sup>32</sup> <https://www.elwatan.com/a-la-une/lalgerie-demande-la-reactivation-de-luma-le-maroc-face-a-ses-contradictions-24-11-2018>

<sup>33</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/union-du-maghreb-arabe-un-sommet-au-maroc-en-2019\\_mg\\_5c0e5453e4b035a7bf5d4736](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/union-du-maghreb-arabe-un-sommet-au-maroc-en-2019_mg_5c0e5453e4b035a7bf5d4736)

<sup>34</sup> <http://www.aps.dz/monde/81912-sommet-de-l-uma-les-ministres-des-affaires-etrangeres-convies-a-une-reunion-preparatoire>

<sup>35</sup> [http://www.lapresse.tn/index.php?option=com\\_nationals&task=article&id=156794](http://www.lapresse.tn/index.php?option=com_nationals&task=article&id=156794)

minister, for his part, affirmed his country's willingness to host the work of the 7th Arab Maghreb Union summit on the occasion of the 30th anniversary of its creation<sup>36</sup>.



**Map 1 – The Arab Maghreb Union**

(Africa Center for Strategic Studies, 2018)

Since the last summit, the North African region has been subject to many changes. The political regimes of the five member countries are highly different, with a transition to democracy unequal from one country to another. Indeed, the outcomes of the Arab Springs are substantially different and the political situations in some countries are currently moving fast. In Algeria, protesters who have obtained the resignation of President Abdelaziz Bouteflika continue to gather every Friday to demand a change of regime. Meanwhile, in light of corruption scandals, General Gaid Salah is proceeding to a series of arrest leading to the political fallout of Algeria's old regime. Presidential elections will be held in November in 2019 in Tunisia<sup>37</sup> and in Mauritania in June 2019, which could be a game changer for the future of the AMU. Furthermore, Libya is currently embedded in a large-scale civil war between Field Marshall Khalifa Haftar and the UN-backed Government of National Accord<sup>38</sup>.

<sup>36</sup> [https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/maroc/tunisie-le-secretaire-general-de-l-union-du-maghreb-arabe-tente-de-ressusciter-une-organisation-moribonde\\_3093907.html](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/monde/afrique/maroc/tunisie-le-secretaire-general-de-l-union-du-maghreb-arabe-tente-de-ressusciter-une-organisation-moribonde_3093907.html)

<sup>37</sup> For more information, see Akrimi, Y. (2019), "Tunisia: How Economic Mismanagement Continues to Undermine the Democratic Process", Brussels International Center. Available here: <https://www.bic-rhr.com/research/tunisia-how-economic-mismanagement-continues-undermine-democratic-process>

<sup>38</sup> For more information, see Lowings, B. (2019), "Libya : The Need for A New International Approach", Brussels International Center. Available here: <https://bit.ly/2VIAnyn>

The Tunisian-Libyan border has witnessed a massive influx of refugees fleeing the war in Libya. But also, tens of thousands of North Africans, especially Tunisians and Moroccans, were forced to leave Libya because of the security situation. A recent study<sup>39</sup> reveals that this crisis has reduced Tunisia's GDP growth rate by 0.4 percentage points and has a significant impact on some sectors, including tourism, investment, financial flows, migrant remittances, and trade in border areas. With regard to Morocco, the UN has organised two round tables for the resolution of the Western Sahara conflict. Unfortunately, these two round tables have highlighted the lack of political willingness and have not led to any concrete positive outcomes for all parties involved. Because of internal and geopolitical obstacles, which hinder any concrete achievements and developments within the Maghreb Union, and a struggle for Maghreb leadership between Algeria and Morocco with the closure of land borders, the AMU has been in a deadlock since 1994. While integration can encourage political and economic convergence and favor the acceleration of democratic transition in North Africa, most of the member countries have failed to provide sufficient efforts for its realisation.

Moreover, the process of integration follows a top-down approach and fails to include a major component of the Maghreb populations, which is civil society. Yet, the place of civil society in the region still differs from one country to another and suffer from the lack of a participatory framework and the necessary range of freedoms, thus making it unable to fully play a significant role<sup>40</sup>. Furthermore, in terms of governance, it should be noted that informality and contraband have developed together with the fears of the shrinking space of freedom for civil society and the press. Corruption in North Africa is still an unfortunate reality, even though it should be noted that the situation in Tunisia is stabilising. The campaign launched in 2017 by the government to fight corruption mobilised the whole society, certainly, but also raises fears regarding the capacity and the will to carry it out with the efficiency and equity required to implement it<sup>41</sup>. In Algeria, businessmen<sup>42</sup> and high-ranked politicians<sup>43</sup> close to former President have been arrested for alleged corruption, including the brother of Abdelaziz Bouteflika<sup>44</sup>.

Thus, it seems that the Maghreb still faces the same social and political problems that led to popular protests, revolutions and the growing sense of exclusion and deep dissatisfaction with the ruling

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<sup>39</sup> Mahjoub, A. et al. (2017), "L'intégration régionale du Maghreb: Quelles alternatives populaires pour une intégration effective et durable? Résumé analytique de l'étude sur le coût du non Maghreb & projet de mémorandum". Available here: <http://ftdes.net/rapports/resume.coutdunonmaghreb.pdf>

<sup>40</sup> Ibid

<sup>41</sup> Ibid

<sup>42</sup> <https://www.bbc.com/afrique/region-48015023>

<sup>43</sup> <http://afrique.le360.ma/algerie/politique/2019/05/05/26291-algerie-apres-avoir-lamine-le-clan-bouteflika-que-compte-faire-gaid-salah-present-26291>

<sup>44</sup> <https://www.lci.fr/international/algerie-le-frere-d-abdelaziz-bouteflika-arrete-2120291.html>

political classes. As a result of the loss of hope and confidence regarding their future, young people are on the front row of these protests, raising their voices against the whole political class. Nevertheless, some forms of reactions can be harmful both for themselves and the cohesion of their society. Indeed, among these reactions are radicalisation, clandestine migration, and peaceful or violent resistance. Thousands of demonstrations and sit-ins in Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco denounce the tendency to criminalise protest movements and use force against these movements<sup>45</sup>. For instance, armed forces have been sent to protect the phosphate mining and oil and gas exploration facilities in southern Tunisia in 2017. In Morocco, in the Rif region, demonstrations demanding more social justice, more development for the deprived areas and for the enlargement of the fields of freedom are occurring in the province of Al-Hoceima<sup>46</sup>.

All in all, a restructuration of the AMU is of utmost importance and relevance not only regarding the current international geopolitics but also for the future of the Maghreb populations as a factor of regional stability and economic prosperity. Furthermore, the AMU needs to be sensitive with regards to the current terrorist threat and global energy security challenge<sup>47</sup>. The AMU is first and foremost about a “common destiny” and close ties between the populations of the regions in terms of language, religion and history. And this perspective is still relevant and a reality nowadays for many people of the North African region.

### **1.3. The *Impasse*: The Western Sahara Conflict**

#### **1.3.1. Explaining the Roots of the Conflict**

As briefly mentioned above, the AMU remains inoperable since 1994 for several reasons, among which is the Western Sahara conflict. The latter is one of the main causes of the interruption of the AMU integration process and one of the manifestations of the failure of the Maghreb political class to overcome its differences<sup>48</sup>. The fact that the border remains closed between Morocco and Algeria continues to feed the Moroccan-Algerian tensions, the race for leadership and the climate of suspicion between the two countries. According to Mahjoub et al., this border constitutes a fracture line, which “jeopardises the development of border regions while being permeable to all forms of trafficking and smuggling to the detriment of the legal and legitimate free movement of persons and

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<sup>45</sup> Mahjoub et al. (2017) above cited n35

<sup>46</sup> Ibid

<sup>47</sup> Lamrani, M. E. (2013), above cited n3

<sup>48</sup> Ibid

property"<sup>49</sup>. Thus, in order to fully understand the dynamic inside the AMU, it seems necessary to explain the roots of the conflict.

At the beginning of the 20th century, Morocco was shared between France and Spain. Most of the country was under French "protectorate" while the Rif, the northern province, was occupied by Spain (excluding Tangier, that was transformed into an international city). Spain also settled in the south, where the Sahara joins the Atlantic, in a very long strip of land. This land is mainly composed of dunes and sand, but has an area of 266,000 square kilometers<sup>50</sup>. In the mid-1970s, Madrid finally decided to leave. The question then was to which political entity should the Spanish Sahara belong. Mauritania claimed the small southern part while Morocco claimed the territory as part of the integral Moroccan state pre-dating colonialism<sup>51</sup>. The Saharawis, the inhabitants of the country, refused to align with this vision. Thus, the Polisario Front (an abbreviated form, in Spanish, of the People's Front for the Liberation of Saguia el Hamra and Rio de Oro) founded in 1973, pleaded for a referendum of self-determination that could lead to independence<sup>52</sup>. In such a case, this is what the UN would also foresee.

On November 6, 1975, while the Spanish army was still present, King Hassan II launched the Green March, a great patriotic demonstration. Some 350,000 unarmed Moroccans, including women, children and the elderly, crossed the border. Spain withdrew and agreed to the demands of Rabat and their ally in Nouakchott. The southern third of the territory would go to Mauritania and two-thirds to Morocco<sup>53</sup>. In February 1976, the Polisario Front categorically refused this decision and proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (RASD), an internationally unrecognised state, claiming sovereignty over the territory, which led to a war.

Tens of thousands of Saharawis, fleeing the conflict, took refuge in camps around Tindouf, in southwestern Algeria (see the map above). This "liberation movement" started a 16-year guerrilla war against Morocco and Mauritania, with support from Gaddafi's Libya and Algeria's Boumediene<sup>54</sup>. Meanwhile, Morocco and Mauritania were supported by the United States. In 1979, Mauritania was subject to a regime change which benefited the Polisario, as the former abandoned its claim over

<sup>49</sup> Mahjoub et al. (2017), above cited n35

<sup>50</sup> <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/afrique/20181204.OBS6569/comprendre-le-conflit-au-sahara-occidental.html>

<sup>51</sup> [https://www.atlasinfo.fr/Texte-integral-du-discours-du-Roi-Mohammed-VI-a-l-occasion-du-43-eme-anniversaire-de-la-Marche-verte\\_a95237.html](https://www.atlasinfo.fr/Texte-integral-du-discours-du-Roi-Mohammed-VI-a-l-occasion-du-43-eme-anniversaire-de-la-Marche-verte_a95237.html)

<sup>52</sup> <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/afrique/20181204.OBS6569/comprendre-le-conflit-au-sahara-occidental.html>

<sup>53</sup> Ibid

<sup>54</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/5-cles-pour-comprendre-le-conflit-du-sahara\\_mg\\_5c45a0cde4b0bfa693c53d4f](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/5-cles-pour-comprendre-le-conflit-du-sahara_mg_5c45a0cde4b0bfa693c53d4f)

the Sahara and retired. Morocco consolidated its position and the war continued. In 1982, Algeria succeeded in bringing the RASD into the Organisation of African Unity (now the AU). As a consequence, Morocco left the institution in protest two years later<sup>55</sup>.

After Mauritania's withdrawal from the region, clashes between the two sides lasted until 1991, causing between 14,000 and 21,000 casualties. In the same year, the UN succeeded in settling a cease-fire and the future organisation of a final status referendum. The UN Security Council also created the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO), which was charged with overseeing the polls. Nevertheless, the polls were continually postponed because of conflicts between the two parties on the right to vote of voters<sup>56</sup>. And the referendum is still pending until now.

In 2007, Morocco proposed a solution for the autonomy of the territory. It stated<sup>57</sup> that the inhabitants of the Western Sahara would democratically manage their affairs through legislative, executive and judicial bodies with exclusive powers. They would have the financial resources necessary for the development of the region in all areas and will participate actively in the economic, social and cultural life of the Kingdom. Morocco would retain its powers in the sovereign domains, in particular the defense, the external relations and the constitutional and religious attributions of the King. The management of Saharan affairs would return to this autonomous power, while foreign affairs, defense, currency, gendarmerie or customs would remain in the hands of Rabat. According to the autonomy plan, the autonomy status of the region would be negotiated and be subject to a free referendum of the populations concerned.

This initiative was described by the UN Security Council as "serious and credible". However, the autonomy plan was rejected by the Polisario Front, which presented an alternative project "preserving the right to self-determination of the Saharawi people"<sup>58</sup>. According to the Polisario, the autonomy plan emphasises the "imperialist, contradictory and unstable" character of the Moroccan position that seeks above all to "heterogenise" the Saharawi population<sup>59</sup>. On one hand, the Kingdom of Morocco widely supported the initiative. On the other, Algeria agreed that Morocco's

<sup>55</sup> <https://www.nouvelobs.com/monde/afrique/20181204.OBS6569/comprendre-le-conflit-au-sahara-occidental.html>

<sup>56</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/5-cles-pour-comprendre-le-conflit-du-sahara\\_mg\\_5c45a0cde4b0bfa693c53d4f](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/5-cles-pour-comprendre-le-conflit-du-sahara_mg_5c45a0cde4b0bfa693c53d4f)

<sup>57</sup> <http://plan-autonomie.com/wp-content/uploads/2010/04/Plan%20Autonomie.pdf>

<sup>58</sup> [https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/04/12/le-maroc-depose-a-l-onu-un-plan-d-autonomie-pour-le-sahara-occidental\\_895024\\_3212.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2007/04/12/le-maroc-depose-a-l-onu-un-plan-d-autonomie-pour-le-sahara-occidental_895024_3212.html)

<sup>59</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/5-cles-pour-comprendre-le-conflit-du-sahara\\_mg\\_5c45a0cde4b0bfa693c53d4f](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/5-cles-pour-comprendre-le-conflit-du-sahara_mg_5c45a0cde4b0bfa693c53d4f)

autonomy plan would not be acceptable. Thus, at that time, all parties were not moving any closer to a compromise solution that both sides could support.

### 1.3.2. The Western Sahara Conflict Today

Since 2007, there have been many meetings of the UN Security Council, which have all resulted in the adoption of resolutions extending the mandate of the MINURSO. The latest to date was on 30 April 2019 during which the Permanent Representative of Morocco to the UN, Omar Hilale, warmly welcomed resolution 2468<sup>60</sup>. He argued that the Resolution reiterates the Polisario's injunction to respect the cease-fire, since paragraph 6 recalls "the commitments made by the Polisario to the Personal Envoy" to withdraw from Guerguarate and to refrain from any destabilising action in Bir Lahlou and Tifariti. Meanwhile, Algeria and the Polisario Front were more reserved regarding the content, which mentions for the first time since 1975, five times the name of Algeria, as an integral actor to "achieve progress towards a political solution"<sup>61</sup>.

On December 5 and 6, a round table was organised by the UN Secretary-General's Personal Envoy for Western Sahara, former President Horst Köhler of Germany, and involved all the parties of the conflict: Morocco, Algeria, the Polisario Front and Mauritania. This meeting took place six years after the failure of the direct negotiations between Morocco and the Polisario Front in New York, which were moderated by the American diplomat Christopher Ross. During this meeting, Rabat criticised the UN Envoy for the fact that these indirect talks were to be followed by "direct contacts", which did not happen. Thus, this December 2018 round table was an occasion to re-engage the four delegations together in direct talks in an effort to discuss the next steps in the political process and to emphasise issues such as regional cooperation, job creation, regional development, stability, security and youth. Furthermore, representatives also discussed in "a consensual climate" the need for Algiers and Rabat to overcome their quarrels of ego to revive the AMU<sup>62</sup>. Nevertheless, even though it was an opportunity to have direct talks, once again, no concrete steps were taken.

This round table was followed by a second one in 21 and 22 March 2019. During the second round table, Horst Köhler's confirmed that the positions remained fundamentally divergent. Indeed, the initiative for a constructive dialogue between all the parties involved still did not lead to tangible results.

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<sup>60</sup> United Nations Security Council Resolution 2468 (2019). Available here: [https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2468\(2019\)](https://undocs.org/en/S/RES/2468(2019))

<sup>61</sup> Ibid, preamble

<sup>62</sup> <https://www.jeuneafrique.com/mag/680016/politique/table-ronde-sur-le-sahara-occidental-un-climat-consensuel-mais-pas-de-faux-espoirs/>



(MINURSO, 2014)

The Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs repeated that his country was ready to discuss “autonomy”, but that under no circumstances it was ready to accept a referendum in which one of the options would be independence<sup>63</sup>. For his part, the head of the Saharawi delegation to the round table on Western Sahara, Khatri Eddouh, reaffirmed that there can be no sustainable solution to the conflict in Western Sahara “without the agreement of the Saharawi people”, stressing an “inalienable” right to self-determination<sup>64</sup>. Finally, Algeria reiterated its support for the Personal Envoy and reaffirmed its trust towards the ability of the Security Council to tackle the issue, while denying any crucial role in the conflict.

<sup>63</sup> <https://www.elwatan.com/edition/international/deuxieme-table-ronde-de-lonu-sur-le-conflit-du-sahara-occidental-le-maroc-opte-pour-la-politique-de-la-fuite-en-avant-24-03-2019>

<sup>64</sup> Ibid

Thus, besides the fact that this second round-table was organised in a spirit of mutual respect, Horst Köhler failed to convince the Moroccan delegation, headed by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Nasser Bourita, to go in the direction of UN Security Council resolutions. A third round of negotiations was already proposed by Köhler and was accepted by all the parties. The Personal Envoy affirmed that the first round table was an occasion to set an atmosphere of mutual respect and dialogue before addressing the issue more into depth during the second and third round tables. However, Köhler resigned in late May 2019, for health reasons, thus leaving a doubt as to the future prospects for the resolution of the conflict.

## 2. The Economic Perspective: Lacking Regional Infrastructure

### 2.1. Intra-Regional Trade

#### 2.1.1. Level of Trade Exchanges between the AMU Countries

The AMU has a real potential for an effective economic integration compared to any other regional economic bloc, namely in terms of language, distance, bilateral trade and border facilities. In 1991, the countries of the AMU signed a Convention on trade and tariff which aimed to concretise the decision of the Presidential Council approving the principles and rules for the establishment of a Customs Union. It was namely convened that each of the Contracting Parties shall exempt products of origin directly exchanged between them from customs duties, taxes and charges having equivalent effect imposed on importation. Nevertheless, as an immediate consequence of some geopolitical considerations mentioned above and restrictive economic policies, the economic development of the region has largely been compromised and has undermined its position on the international scene. While some Maghreb countries have made substantial progress in terms of trade exchanges, the region as a whole remains one of the least integrated in the world. Intra-regional trade accounts for less than 5% of the total trade of its constituent countries, a much lower percentage than in any other regional trade bloc in the world.

According to a study made by the International Monetary Fund (IMF)<sup>65</sup>, AMU member country integration would create a regional market of nearly 100 million people, each with an average income of about \$4,000 in nominal terms and about \$12,000 in purchasing power parity. The region

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<sup>65</sup> Fonds Monétaire International (2018), "L'intégration économique du Maghreb: Une source de croissance inexploitée", pdf version

would be more attractive for foreign direct investment, reduce the costs of intra-regional trade, capital and labor flows, and improve the efficiency of resource allocation. The Maghreb would also be more resilient to exogenous shocks and market volatility.

**Table 1 – AMU countries’ economic profile**

	Level of income	Strengths	Weaknesses
Algeria	Upper-middle income	- Region’s largest economy - Major exporter of oil and gas	- Highly dependent on hydrocarbons - Faces major macroeconomic challenges posed by the drop in oil prices in 2014
Libya	Upper-middle income	Major exporter of oil and gas	Suffers from the civil conflict since 2011, which led to serious economic and social consequences
Mauritania	Lower-middle income	- Major producer of iron and ore - Has grown relatively quickly	Faces the challenge of volatile metal prices
Morocco	Middle income	- Second region’s largest economy - Fairly diversified economy - Major regional producer of agricultural products, cars and fertilizers	Vulnerable to fluctuations in agricultural production and external demand
Tunisia	Small intermediate-income	- Major regional producer of electric components, spare parts for light machinery and equipment, and olive oil and clothing	Aims to regain broad-based growth and restore macroeconomic stability after several domestic and external shocks

However, the region suffers from a low intra-regional trade. For instance, the level of intra-regional trade between Algeria and Morocco has largely decreased since 2013. More specifically, the level of exports of Algeria to Morocco was 1051,8 million \$US in 2013 and then 499,1 million \$US in 2016, thus the volume of exports was cut by a half (Table 2 and Table 3). For his part, Algeria is still the first destination country for the export of Moroccan goods compared to other Arab Maghreb countries (Table 3) but compared to its exportation to the world, this volume of exports to Algeria only represents 1%. With regard to the volume of exports to the world, it should be noted that the level of exportations of Algeria and Morocco is much higher with the rest of the world than with the AMU

(Table 2 and Table 3) which could be a direct consequence of the tense relations between the two countries.

On average, Morocco and Algeria export respectively more than 40 times and 25 times more to the rest of the world than to Arab Maghreb countries. Moreover, it should be noted that all the AMU countries, except Morocco, are less open to trade in recent years (see Tables 2, 3, 4 and 5). According to the IMF, a similar trend can be observed in the rest of the world, which is characterised by a weak international economic activity and investment in particular, the slowdown in trade liberalisation, lower product prices including oil, and the weakening of growth in global value chains (GVCs). Moreover, the decline in trade openness in Algeria, Libya and Mauritania can be explained by the fall in commodity prices as well as the lack of diversification<sup>66</sup>. Thus, none of the five Maghreb countries have their main trading partners within the AMU and intra-regional exchanges are very low, which confirms the lack of complementarity.

**Table 2 – Exports of goods of Algeria**

	<b>Exports of goods of Algeria (million \$US)</b>			
<b>Partners</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Libya	22,4	36,4	22,5	31,1
Mauritania	29,2	247,9	57,1	38,5
Morocco	1051,8	1131,1	629,9	499,1
Tunisia	1649,0	1574,6	846,0	603,5
Arab Maghreb	2752,5	2990,0	1555,5	1172,1
<b>World</b>	<b>65998,1</b>	<b>60387,7</b>	<b>34796,0</b>	<b>29992,1</b>

Source : maghrebarab.org

**Table 3 – Exports of goods of Morocco**

	<b>Exports of goods of Morocco (million \$US)</b>			
<b>Partners</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>2014</b>	<b>2015</b>	<b>2016</b>
Algeria	209,4	210,3	196,9	236,0
Libya	87,2	36,4	68,3	89,6
Mauritania	141,1	171,7	162,2	172,9
Tunisia	86,9	96,4	109,3	98,4
Arab Maghreb	524,5	514,8	536,6	597,0
<b>World</b>	<b>21965,4</b>	<b>23815,8</b>	<b>22036,8</b>	<b>22858,3</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org

<sup>66</sup> Ibid

Table 4 – Exports of goods of Mauritania

Partners	Exports of goods of Mauritania (million \$US)			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Algeria	0,0	0,1	-	0,0
Libya	0,1		-	0,0
Morocco	0,2	0,9	-	0,4
Tunisia	0,6	1,3	-	2,4
Arab Maghreb	0,9	2,2	-	2,9
<b>World</b>	<b>2462,5</b>	<b>2139,8</b>	-	<b>1622,8</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org

Table 5 – Exports of goods in Tunisia

Partners	Exports of goods of Tunisia (million \$US)			
	2013	2014	2015	2016
Algeria	486,4	619,0	558,2	664,2
Libya	869,0	667,8	540,0	442,7
Mauritania	31,4	29,3	21,9	15,8
Morocco	192,2	179,6	180,1	169,2
Arab Maghreb	1579,0	1495,7	1300,2	1291,9
<b>World</b>	<b>17060,5</b>	<b>16759,7</b>	<b>14073,5</b>	<b>13575,1</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org<sup>67</sup>

According to a study by Dr Azzam Mahjoub<sup>68</sup>, the weak diversification of the Maghreb economies limits the scope of their intra-regional trade. Indeed, the AMU countries have much more concentrated exports than other so called developing countries. This weak complementarity of trade is partly explained by the weak industrialisation in the cases of Libya, Algeria and Mauritania<sup>69</sup>. The concentration of exports is considerably different from one country to another. With the exception of Morocco and Tunisia, the Maghreb countries export a small range of products. Exports from Algeria, Libya and Mauritania are highly concentrated. Fuels represent 97% and 98% of all Algerian and Libyan exports respectively in 2011 (Table 6 and 7). Although, in 2015 and more specially 2016, Libya has tried to diversify its exports, the level of diversification is still very low to achieve an economic integration (Table 7). Mauritania's exports are dominated by primary products such as minerals, metals and fishery products (Table 8). The main export sectors of Morocco and Tunisia, on the other hand, are more diversified since they include the manufacturing sector (chemical products, machinery, spare parts of equipment), the agricultural sector and the service sector (tourism and financial and medical activities) (Tables 9 and 10).

<sup>67</sup> With regard to Libya's exports of goods, no table were available on the Arab Maghreb Union website.

<sup>68</sup> Mahjoub, A. et al. (2017), above cited n35

<sup>69</sup> Ibid

Table 6 – Algeria's structure of exports by type of products

Algeria	Structure of exports by type of products (%)					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Food products and drinks	0,5	0,4	0,6	0,5	0,7	1,1
Industrial supplies	2,2	2,3	2,4	3,7	4,8	4,8
Fuels et lubricants	97,2	97,2	96,9	95,8	94,4	94,0
Machinery and equipments	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Transport equipments and accessories	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Industrial consumption goods	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1
Various	-	-	-	0,0	-	0,0
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org

Table 7 – Libya's structure of exports by type of products

Libya	Structure of exports by type of products (%)					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Food and animal products	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,1	0,3	0,3
Drinks and tobaccos	-	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0
Raw non-food products	0,1	0,0	0,2	0,7	1,0	1,6
Petroleum products and lubricants	98,0	99,7	99,1	92,7	82,7	66,2
Animal and vegetable oils and fats	-	-	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0
Chemical products	1,2	0,1	0,3	0,6	1,9	1,3
Item classified by manufacturing base	0,6	0,2	0,3	0,9	0,8	0,9
Transport equipment	-	-	-	0,0	0,1	0,2
Various products	0,0	-	0,0	0,1	0,1	0,1
Non-classified goods	-	-	-	4,8	13,1	29,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org

Table 8 – Mauritania's structure of exports by type of products

Mauritania	Structure of exports by type of products (%)					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Iron ore	56,9	38,5	47,4	37,2	24,3	29,0
Gold	13,4	12,1	13,2	14,0	16,2	13,5
Copper	7,3	11,9	11,3	9,4	16,3	11,8
Oil	4,4	10,3	8,1	6,9	4,4	3,5
Fishery products	17,6	23,5	17,3	29,4	38,4	41,8
Other products	0,4	3,6	2,7	3,1	0,4	0,4
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org

Table 9 – Morocco's structure of exports by type of products

Morocco	Structure of exports by type of products (%)					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Food, drinks, tobaccos	16,4	16,3	18,0	17,8	19,0	19,5
Energy and lubricants	2,6	4,0	4,9	3,3	1,4	0,9
Raw products	13,0	11,9	9,6	8,7	9,5	7,7
Semi-finished products	30,8	28,5	24,4	24,1	22,8	20,8
Finished equipment goods	15,2	15,1	17,6	16,9	17,8	18,7
Finished consumables	21,8	24,0	25,4	28,8	29,1	31,8
Industrial gold	0,3	0,1	0,1	0,4	0,4	0,5
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>99,8</b>

Source: maghrebarab.org

**Table 10 – Tunisia’s structure of exports by type of industries**

Tunisia	Structure of exports by type of industry (%)					
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016
Agriculture and food processing industry	10,3	9,7	9,9	8,1	14,5	10,6
Energy and lubricants	14,5	16,8	15,2	13,2	7,2	5,6
Mines and phosphates	5,2	6,2	6,0	5,7	4,0	4,9
Clothing products and leather	25,4	22,3	22,5	22,7	21,7	22,3
Engineering and electricity industries	37,0	36,6	37,4	40,7	41,5	45,5
Other manufacturing industries	7,5	8,4	9,0	9,6	11,0	11,1
<b>Total</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>	<b>100,0</b>

Source : maghrebarab.org

### 2.1.2. Intra-Regional Development Projects

The number of intra-regional development projects is highly limited, mainly due to the lack of political will. Thus, this policy report will address two in particular: the project of a trans-Maghreb highway and railway line, which were both initiated in the 1990s. The trans-Maghreb highway, which is 7,000 kilometers long, aims at connecting Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia. More precisely, it was supposed to connect the city of Agadir (Morocco) to the city of Gabes (Tunisia) in the short term. In Algeria, the east-west road, the longest part of this project with 1,216 km, has been operational since 2013. In Morocco, the motorway is already operational between Agadir, Marrakech, Casablanca, Rabat, Fes and Oujda. In Tunisia, the 530 km Bou Salem-Tunis-Sousse-Sfax-Gabes section is already operational. If the road connecting the Algerian border to Bou Salem (Tunisia), and that connecting the Libyan border to Gabes (Tunisia) were achieved, the Tunisian programme would be complete<sup>70</sup>. However, once again, due to the Algeria-Morocco border issue, no progress was achieved to connect the Algerian and Moroccan highways.

The Trans-Maghreb railway line should be approximately 2,350 km. This project is a concrete example of intra-regional economic integration, as it aims to promote trade between Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia and to bring people together by ensuring free movement of goods and people between countries and to improve their social and economic conditions through, *inter alia*, job creation and the consolidation of the economy at the local and regional level<sup>71</sup>. While the project was initiated in the 1990s, no significant progress was achieved. However, in February 2019, the AMU proposed to revive the project after receiving a grant from the African Development Bank (AfDB) under the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)<sup>72</sup>. This donation should be used

<sup>70</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/luma-relance-le-projet-de-la-ligne-ferroviaire-tunis-alger-rabat\\_mg\\_5c5998f9e4b00187b5550cc2](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/luma-relance-le-projet-de-la-ligne-ferroviaire-tunis-alger-rabat_mg_5c5998f9e4b00187b5550cc2)

<sup>71</sup> <https://nepad.org/project/trans-maghreb-highway>

<sup>72</sup> *Ibid*

to finance the cost of the preparatory activities of this project<sup>73</sup>. The project includes several measures that will be taken, the most important of which are the creation of a new railway section crossing the border between Tunisia and Algeria (Annaba-Jendouba), the modernisation of the railway line between Jendouba and Al-Jadida, the modernisation of the railway line in Morocco (Fez-Oujda), as well as the modernisation of power systems and subsystems. In March 2019, the General Secretariat of the AMU announced that a study on the technical and financial aspects of the project was presented. The next step will be to find the financial means, amounting to around \$4 billion, necessary for its realisation.

## 2.2. International Trade

While the AMU has worked towards the elaboration of strong economic integration goals, it has remained inactive for many years. Instead, Maghreb countries are widely taking part in international trade organisations and have concluded a number of agreements with external partners, some of which include provisions for intra-regional agreements. And these agreements have had a greater economic impact on the AMU countries than the AMU's integration goals provided for in the 1994 AMU Declaration for the creation of a Maghreb Free Trade Area for instance.

It is also because the Maghreb countries have traditionally been close with their European neighbours and have thus concluded several trade agreements with the EU<sup>74</sup>. The Euro-Mediterranean Agreement was concluded between Algeria, Morocco and Tunisia as well as with other countries, and the EU. The aim of this agreement is to remove barriers to trade and investment between the EU and the southern Mediterranean countries and between these countries themselves. Mauritania is part of the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) between the EU and West African countries which aims to liberalise bilateral trade and provide development assistance<sup>75</sup>. In addition, Algeria is Russia's first African customer in the field of arms sales. In January 2019, Algeria and Russia reinforced their strategic partnership during the 9th session of the Algerian-Russian Joint Economic Commission, which aimed to explore new areas of cooperation.

Moreover, the Maghreb countries also jointly participate in some international organisations. For instance, founded in 1945, all members are part of the League of Arab States, which plays a leading role in the integration efforts of the MENA region. Member countries are also all members of the

<sup>73</sup> [https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/luma-veut-lancer-une-ligne-ferroviaire-reliant-le-maroc-lalgerie-et-la-tunisie\\_mg\\_5c581072e4b08710475513e2](https://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/entry/luma-veut-lancer-une-ligne-ferroviaire-reliant-le-maroc-lalgerie-et-la-tunisie_mg_5c581072e4b08710475513e2)

<sup>74</sup> Fonds Monétaire International (2018), above cited n60

<sup>75</sup> Ibid

African Union and of the Agreement on the Global System of Trade Preferences among Developing Countries, established in 1988 by the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), which aims to provide a framework for the exchange of trade preferences between developing countries. Furthermore, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia are members of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), which they use as a platform for negotiation and dispute resolution. Algeria and Libya respectively applied to join the WTO in 1987 and 2004, but negotiations have not yet been concluded<sup>76</sup>.

The Maghreb countries are widely opening trade with China. Since the beginning of the 2000s, Chinese exports to the Maghreb have increased considerably, reaching \$14 billion in 2016 (12% of total Maghreb imports) compared to less than \$5 billion ten years earlier (8% of the total imports)<sup>77</sup>. Chinese shipments include, among others, agricultural machinery, tractors and motor vehicles. Thus, according to the IMF's study, increased competition and cooperation with China could be a factor that undermines regional integration. In addition to China, other Asian countries have also become an important external market for all Maghreb countries, especially Mauritania. Moreover, in 2018, Mauritania signed a region-to-region trade agreement, the Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with the EU, a negotiated agreement with 16 countries of the West African region.

In 2013, Algeria, Libya, Morocco and Tunisia signed an agreement with China within the framework of China's so called "The Belt and the Road" (or the New Silk Road) initiative, which aims to connect Asia with Africa and Europe to improve regional integration, trade and stimulate economic growth<sup>78</sup>. It focuses on policy coordination, connectivity of infrastructure (railways, ports, roads, energy facilities etc.), unimpeded trade (greater liberalisation and facilitation of trade and investment etc.), and financial integration (cooperation between financial institutions, financial market system, international investment and financing etc.).

Because the regional economic cooperation is very low, cross-border financial integration remains highly limited. Moroccan banks operating across national borders are the most active in the region. For example, the Attijariwafa Bank, which is the first and largest bank in Morocco and seventh in Africa by size, has established itself in Tunisia and Mauritania but has been limited in Algeria and Libya. Thus, the Maghreb has almost no cross-border financial institution<sup>79</sup>. While, the level of

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<sup>76</sup> Ibid

<sup>77</sup> Ibid

<sup>78</sup> <https://eng.yidaiyilu.gov.cn>

<sup>79</sup> Fonds Monétaire International (2018), above cited n60

development of the financial sector varies from one Maghreb country to another, access to financing is a challenge which all the AMU countries must address<sup>80</sup>.

### **2.3. State of Play: The Crucial Need to Open Intra-Regional Trade**

There are several factors that can explain the weak economic integration in AMU, such as the application of restrictive trade and investment policies, the presence of tariff and non-tariff barriers to trade, the lack of regional infrastructure and geopolitical factors. In addition, the AMU has not been functional since 1994, the year during which the long border between Algeria and Morocco was closed. Since then, several projects were unachieved or blocked, including the Trans-Maghreb railway line. The region has also been subject to more and more terrorist threats that led to stricter border controls. Furthermore, as demonstrated above, the AMU countries have traditionally oriented trade towards Europe (European Union, EU member countries and Russia), China as an export market and more recently sub-Saharan Africa, which has further compromised intra-regional economic integration of the Maghreb countries<sup>81</sup>.

A first problem for the realisation of the AMU is that Maghreb countries have applied lower tariffs with Europe than with each other, despite the 1991 Convention. As a result, because each member country has oriented trade towards the major economic powers, the AMU countries are not encouraged to trade with each other, which seriously undermines efforts for the realisation of an integrated market. For example, the simple average tariff applied in the Maghreb countries was around 14% in 2016, compared with 5% in the European Union, 4% in the United States and 10% in China<sup>82</sup>. While the average tariff rates are around 12% in the AMU countries, the Algerian average rate is 19% making it the most protected market in the AMU. And even in countries open to trade, some sectors are also highly protected. For example, the import duty on agricultural products is 28% in Morocco and 31% in Tunisia<sup>83</sup>.

In addition to tariff barriers, intra-regional trade is also subject to a large number of non-tariff barriers. The average cost of exports is one of the highest in the world and varies considerably within the region between the most efficient exporters (Morocco and Tunisia) and the least efficient ones (Algeria, Libya, Mauritania)<sup>84</sup>. Another example is the weak networks of land and air transport, which is harmful to the commercial integration of the region. In the Maghreb region, transport can

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<sup>80</sup> Ibid

<sup>81</sup> Ibid

<sup>82</sup> Ibid

<sup>83</sup> Ibid

<sup>84</sup> Ibid

be achieved through sea, air, road and rail. However, except the maritime transport, all the infrastructure is insufficiently developed. The Cairo-Dakar is the only highway that is able to connect the Maghreb countries<sup>85</sup>. But because Algeria and Morocco closed the border, the transport of goods is not feasible between Libya, Tunisia and Algeria, on one hand, and Morocco and Mauritania, on the other.

Moreover, all the AMU countries have developed their own port infrastructure towards Europe, thus further undermining impulses for intra-regional trade. The port of Tangier is one of the few internationally competitive ports. One of the consequences is that most of the trans-Maghreb maritime traffic pass by Morocco, thus bypassing the other AMU's member countries ports. Accordingly, maritime connections between the Maghreb countries are very low since they rely on third-country's ports, such as Marseille (France), Almeria (Spain) and Rotterdam (the Netherlands) as transportation roads for the goods they trade with each other. This, in turn, dramatically increase the costs and price-competitiveness of traded products<sup>86</sup>.

Despite the fact that AMU countries are present on world markets, efforts to build a viable AMU should be directed towards intra-regional trade. Indeed, regional economic integration is fundamental for the AMU countries. First of all, the countries of the AMU are located at the gate of the EU, a strongly integrated market composed of 500 million customers. The AMU are not only all connected to each other, in terms of language, culture and religion, and share borders but they also could become an interface, in terms of trade and investments, between sub-Saharan Africa and the EU. They could benefit from intra-regional integration, namely in terms of economies of scale and foreign direct investments. They could develop regional value chains and reinforce their capacity to negotiate by coordinating their policies, which could in turn increase regional exchanges and accelerate economic growth<sup>87</sup>. An integrated market of 100 million customers could emerge. If the AMU countries commit to make integration effective, with common commercial and investment rules, the region could be more prepared to tackle the side-effects of worldwide commercial conflicts. In turn, a consolidated integrated market could attract foreign direct investment, and exchange best practices and technologies<sup>88</sup>.

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid

<sup>86</sup> Ibid

<sup>87</sup> Ibid

<sup>88</sup> Ibid

### 3. The Cultural Element: An Underrated Priority

#### 3.1. A Common Historical Legacy

To begin with, despite the existence of a deep political gap between the AMU countries, the five countries, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania, Morocco and Tunisia, share a well-anchored geographical, human and historical unity as the basis of their cultural identity<sup>89</sup>. The intangible cultural heritage of the Maghreb countries is rooted in a long history, which has been influenced by a large number of different cultures. Inherited from the Berber or Amazigh culture, the Maghreb countries share archaeological relics, material culture, spoken languages (Berbers and Maghrebian Arabs), culinary art, costume, and oral literature or music and dance<sup>90</sup>. Each country has inherited from influences from elsewhere, including from Egypt, Ancient Greece, Rome, Sub-Saharan Africa, Iberia or even globalisation<sup>91</sup>. The Maghreb went through substantial transformations with French colonisation, which lasted from 1830 to 1962 in Algeria, from 1881 to 1954 in Tunisia, from 1920 to 1960 in Mauritania and from 1912 to 1955 in Morocco and with Italian colonisation, which lasted from 1911 to 1943 in Libya.

These historical events have irreversibly marked the Maghreb and gave it a Berber culture, an Arab culture, and, with the exception of Libya, a French culture. All of these cultures have shaped the region as it is today and have contributed to the idea of a broader project: the Arab Maghreb Union. Indeed, the idea of the AMU initially comes from the fight of its members against a common purpose, which was the fight against colonialism. This nationalistic trajectory was seen as a means to challenge French cultural expansion, and the old Arab-Islamic culture was to play a vital role in this struggle. According to Maurice Flory, allegiance to these cultural traditions was both “the best identification with the "Other" and the most effective defense against any form of alienation”<sup>92</sup>.

##### 3.1.1. Berber Culture

After consolidating the Andalusian Arab civilisation in Spain, the Berbers, represented by two great dynasties, Almoravides (1053-1147) and Almohades (1147-1272), gave the Maghreb its modern Arab-Islamic identity. Examples include the Merinids, Saadians and Alawites, especially in Morocco<sup>93</sup>.

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<sup>89</sup> Flory, M. (1971), “La coopération pour le développement, nouvel axe d’une politique culturelle avec les pays arabes”, in *Politique Etrangère* 36-5-6, pp. 553-564. Available here: [https://www.persee.fr/doc/polit\\_0032-342x\\_1971\\_num\\_36\\_5\\_1957](https://www.persee.fr/doc/polit_0032-342x_1971_num_36_5_1957)

<sup>90</sup> UNESCO (2009), “Le patrimoine culturel immatériel au Maghreb – Législations et institutions nationales, instruments internationaux et modalités de sauvegarde”, pdf version

<sup>91</sup> Ibid

<sup>92</sup> Flory, M. (1971), above cited n78

<sup>93</sup> Ibid

The Berber language is still present in all of the AMU countries. While the Berbers are closely tied to Islam and to Arabic, their language is generally used in popular expressions<sup>94</sup>. For instance, the Berber language is widely spread in poetry, on a large range of topics, which go from the expression of love to social and political issues. For instance, poets inspire from rural exodus and unemployment, such as precarious living conditions and very low salary. Regarding the political dimension, the poets mainly denounce the exploitation of the poor by the rich. In fact, the Berber resistance to colonisation in Morocco was fierce from 1912 to 1934, thus leaving a whole repertoire of resistance poems that have been transmitted through generations<sup>95</sup>. Thus, Berber culture is still present in the societies of the Arab Maghreb, either as means to denounce social inequalities or to spread revolutionary ideas<sup>96</sup>. This solid legacy shows that a strong cultural connection between the Maghreb Arab countries should be preserved through the AMU.

### 3.1.2. Arab Culture

The Maghreb is highly representative of the Arab culture since it has actively participated in its development and spread on both sides of the Mediterranean. The Arab-Islamic culture encompasses not only emotional or religious dimensions but it has also been a "scientific and secular vehicle in the history of the Mediterranean", especially during the "golden age" of Islam<sup>97</sup>. In addition, classical Arab culture also encompasses philosophical and social speculation aspects. For its part, Mauritania is characterised by a cultural division. On one hand, there are the Moors, from the Arab tribes (Hilali qabâ'il), mixed with indigenous Berber populations (znâga) which would still have cultural practices linked to the Bedouin way of living. On the other, there are the black Mauritanian community, from Sahelo-Sudanian populations, which are characterised by a sense of territoriality and agricultural activities<sup>98</sup>.

The AMU countries have also inherited from the Arab-Islamic tradition in the field of education. It was in the seventieth century that the Arab-Muslim educational institutions were established in the Maghreb region along with Islam. Among these institutions are Kuranic schools, which are the equivalent of elementary school, and *Medersas* and *Zaouias*, which are the equivalent of secondary education. Finally, with regards to university institutions, examples include Zitouna based in Tunis or Qaraouiyyine of Fes in Morocco. For Morocco, the latter, which was built in 859 by two sisters of Qaraouan origin, is considered as the oldest university in the world and is used to attract students

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<sup>94</sup> Ibid

<sup>95</sup> Ibid

<sup>96</sup> Ibid

<sup>97</sup> Ibid

<sup>98</sup> Pouessel, S. et al. (2012), "Noirs au Maghreb: Enjeux identitaires"

both from the Arab Mediterranean and from Europe<sup>99</sup>. And because these universities have taught scientists in all disciplines, they have widespread sciences on a global level. For instance, some ancient manuscripts cite Ibn Roschd, who was the first to try to understand how the circulation of blood works, or Ibn al-Banna, who wrote the Talkhis treaty at the end of the thirteenth century<sup>100</sup>.

### 3.1.3. Colonial Legacy

As a direct consequence of French colonialism, new institutions were created, especially Franco-Arabic education systems. However, since the independence of Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia, this French education system has been subject to many modifications, including structural changes, or modifications in the national curriculum. Also, the four countries expressed their willingness to establish a bilingual curriculum, with Arabic language representing the Maghreb cultural identity, and the French language representing the opening to the world and modern technology<sup>101</sup>.

For its part, Libya was colonised by Italy, which developed towns, roads and agricultural colonies for Italian settlers. In 1935, Benito Mussolini initiated the program of Italian immigration called "demographic colonisation" that led to the settlement of some 150,000 Italians by the outbreak of World War II<sup>102</sup>. However, these efforts were destroyed during the North Africa campaigns of 1941-43, which saw the withdrawal of Italians by the end of 1942. Ultimately, Italian colonisation did not result in the spread of Italian language or culture in Libya, contrary to French colonisation in other AMU countries.

### 3.2. Inter-Cultural Exchanges

Thus, even if the Maghreb countries have followed their own path until and since independence, they still share a common culture, which can be found in the Mediterranean litoral, mountain ranges or oasis areas. Exchanges and influences between Mauritania, Libya, Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia include techniques for collecting and supplying irrigation water, oasis farming methods or conservation and consumption of agricultural products for examples<sup>103</sup>. In addition, in 1992, a convention for cultural cooperation was signed between the countries of the Maghreb and the Arab

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<sup>99</sup> Flory, M. (1971), above cited n78

<sup>100</sup> Ibid

<sup>101</sup> Ibid

<sup>102</sup> <https://www.britannica.com/place/Libya/History>

<sup>103</sup> Ibid

Maghreb Prize for Cultural Creation was established as well as agreement concerning the creation of a Maghreb National Book Council in 1994.

### **3.2.1. Algeria**

In October/November 2019, Algeria will host the 24th edition of the International Book Fair of Algiers. Organised by the Algerian Ministry of Culture, this cultural event is the biggest in the country and one of the most important events in Africa and in the Arab world. For instance, in 2010, no less than 1,200,000 visitors attended the event. Representatives from Tunisia, Libya and Morocco attended previous editions.

Algeria has set up good relations in terms of cultural exchanges with Tunisia, namely with regards to artistic exchanges. For instance, Algeria signed its first bilateral agreement on cultural affairs with Tunisia in 1963 and executive programs of cultural cooperation were signed in 1997/1998, 2001/2002 and 2005/2006. As previously explained in Chapter 1 of this contribution, because of the tense relations between Algeria and Morocco over the issue of the Western Sahara, the cultural exchanges between the two countries remain very low, except during the Algerian cultural weeks organised in Morocco or when Algeria invites some Moroccan artists<sup>104</sup>. Thus, the 1992 convention was compromised and multilateral cooperation was impeded until 2007 when diplomatic relations somewhat eased between the two countries. Indeed, in 2007, a meeting between the Ministers of Culture was organised in Algiers, which led to the 4th Maghreb Book fair. Similarly, in 2009, the month of Maghreb cultural heritage was re-established<sup>105</sup>.

With regard to the independent cultural sector, civil society is making efforts to build and preserve artistic ties with Tunisia and Morocco. However, because civil society is poorly structured in this field, Algerian artists do not sufficiently benefit from exchange programs or receive enough subsidies to travel to the AMU countries<sup>106</sup>.

### **3.2.2. Libya**

In response to its weak relations with Tunisia since the 2011 uprisings, Libyans and Tunisians artists have developed in 2018 the cultural project "Breaking the ice" in order to promote the countries'

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<sup>104</sup> Kessab, A. and Benslimane, D. (2013), "Etude comparative sur certains aspects des politiques culturelles en Algérie, en Egypte, au Maroc et en Tunisie". Available here :

<https://www.racines.ma/sites/default/files/Étude%20comparative%20secteur%20culturel%20Afrique%20du%20Nord.pdf>

<sup>105</sup> Ibid

<sup>106</sup> Ibid

artists and strengthen cultural ties<sup>107</sup>. Libya has also provided financial assistance to Mauritania in the past for several projects. However, “institutional” cultural exchanges often suffer from the lack of established state institutions.

Indeed, the Libyan context is different than for the other AMU countries. Since the 2011 uprisings that overthrew the regime of Muammar Gaddafi, Libya remains a highly unstable country without established political institutions or governance. In 2014, two governments, one claiming from the National General Congress, and the other from the elected House of Representatives, fought for legitimacy. This quarrel plunged the country into a new civil war. A national unity government was formed in March 2016 with the support of the UN but is still trying to impose its authority. In such a context, the development of Libya’s cultural policy and implementation of concrete projects remain limited. As a direct consequence, Libya’s cultural structures are under-developed and lack infrastructure, funding and networking<sup>108</sup>. In addition, the level of cultural qualifications is very low which make it hard for artists and cultural managers to develop their projects<sup>109</sup>.

### 3.2.3. Mauritania

Since its independence, Mauritania established relations with Tunisia. In 1961, the Tunisian government offered 21 internship grants to enable Mauritania magistrates of Muslim law to complete their training in Tunisia. Conversely, Tunisia sent a magistrate and two teachers to Mauritania in order to re-organise the National Institute of Higher Islamic Studies. This cultural cooperation was also extended to the Maghreb, from Tunisia, to Libya and Algeria. Libya provided financial assistance to Mauritania for several projects, including the construction of the Institute of Islamic Studies of Boutlimitt. Furthermore, in 1977, the two countries signed an agreement which include a chapter on cultural cooperation, with the inauguration of a Libyan Arab cultural centre in Nouakchott<sup>110</sup>.

It is with Algeria that the cooperation has developed the most, encompassing many areas and representing a real asset to strengthen its political and economic influence in the south of the Sahara<sup>111</sup>. In 1970, a permanent joint committee was established and new agreements were signed, including in the cultural field. For instance, in 1973, between 150 and 200 Mauritanian students

<sup>107</sup> <https://thearabweekly.com/tunisian-and-libyan-artists-breaking-ice-through-culture-project>

<sup>108</sup> <https://www.goethe.de/ins/eg/en/kul/sup/duw/kal.html>

<sup>109</sup> Ibid

<sup>110</sup> Constantin, F. and Coulou, C. (2013), “Les relations internationales de la Mauritanie”, dans “Introduction à la Mauritanie”, ed. CNRS and Centre d’étude d’Afrique noire, pp. 323-360. Available here:

<https://books.openedition.org/iremam/1245?lang=en>

<sup>111</sup> Ibid

went to Algeria and many Algerian workers, namely in the fields of education, administration and services, to Mauritania. With regard to cooperation with Morocco, cultural exchanges were low when the two countries were engaged in a political dialogue on the decolonisation of the Spanish Sahara<sup>112</sup>. Once a sharing agreement was defined between the two countries, numerous ministerial meetings of senior officials took place, which strengthened their cooperation in the cultural field. Several donations have been made to finance several cultural projects, such as the construction of a youth center, a sports complex and a cultural center in Nouakchott<sup>113</sup>.

#### **3.2.4. Morocco**

Morocco has signed several cultural agreements and conventions with European, African or American countries, the oldest one can be traced back from 1957 with France. In 1999, the Union of Writers of Morocco (UEM) and the Union of Tunisian Writers (UET) signed, in Tunis, a cooperation agreement under which both parties undertook to exchange their experiences in the field of cultural and artistic creation, and to coordinate the efforts within the framework of the Arab and international colloquiums and forums. Similarly, in 2013, the Moroccan-Tunisian Youth Agency signed the 2013 programme, which includes many activities dedicated to young people covering the cultural, touristic and scientific fields, as well as the exchange of expertise and experiences. With regards to the cultural exchanges between Algiers and Rabat, it is limited to the participation to cultural and artistic events in both countries, including the International Book Fair of Algiers. In 2007, Morocco also participated in the events "Algeria, capital of Arab culture", during which Rabat organised a Moroccan artistic and cultural week<sup>114</sup>.

Civil society is highly active in Morocco and plays an important role in the cultural exchanges of the country, namely through independent initiatives such as festivals. A number of Moroccan artists travel to the other Maghreb countries and attend artistic events<sup>115</sup>.

#### **3.2.5. Tunisia**

Since independence, Tunisia plays a very important role in the region, as a "neutral actor". Thus, the country has naturally established cultural relations with the other Maghreb countries. Indeed, regional integration was made a policy priority on the agenda of former President Bourguiba.

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<sup>112</sup> Ibid

<sup>113</sup> Ibid

<sup>114</sup> Kessab, A. and Benslimane, D. (2013), above cited n94

<sup>115</sup> Ibid

The Algerian-Tunisian cultural relations cover a wide range of fields including higher education, scientific research, culture, youth and sports, information and communication, theological issues and finally the improvement of living conditions in the two countries. Algerian and Tunisian artists perform regularly in Algeria and Tunisia. Thus, during the year 2009, Algeria took an active part in the event "Kairouan, capital of Islamic culture"<sup>116</sup>. And, in April 2018, Algeria was chosen as a guest of honor at the 34th Tunis International Book Fair. Tunisia has also good relations with Mauritania in terms of cultural exchanges. For instance, in November 2018, the 18th session of the Mauritano-Tunisian Joint Cooperation Commission took place with the signature of 20 conventions, memorandum of understanding and executive programmes aimed at strengthening cooperation between the two countries. For instance, two executive programs of cooperation were signed: one in the field of education and one in the field of cultural cooperation 2019-2021.

In terms of institutional cultural exchanges, political conflicts between the Maghreb countries make them low. For instance, these conflicts can lead to the cancellation of cultural events. However, those cultural manifestations remain irregular, with low media profile and mainly about Tunisia's cultural heritage<sup>117</sup>. In addition, none of the AMU countries has cultural centers in the rest of the region.

Civil society is more active. Cultural activities include meetings for the professionalisation of the cultural sector, and reflection around the issues of culture and often revolve around contemporary creation or new artistic scenes. However, there are major obstacles to the development of cultural exchanges through civil society, such as the lack of financial means since the costs for the organisation of such exchanges are high in terms of transportation, housing and artists incomes and the mobility is complicated namely due to the closure of the border between Algeria and Morocco, and the lack of communication between artistic structures<sup>118</sup>.

### **3.3. A Step Towards the Realisation of the AMU: The Intangible Cultural Heritage**

Despite the weak level of intra-regional cultural exchanges, the countries of the AMU have a huge potential for an integrated cultural and artistic arena. Indeed, by sharing a common cultural heritage, there is a real ground for the AMU countries to create a solid network of artists and to implement the idea of the Treaty of Marrakech for an effective cooperation in the cultural field. For instance, during the fourth session of the Intergovernmental committee for the safeguarding of the

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<sup>116</sup> <http://www.ambdz.tn/Relation%20bilaterales/Rubriques%20Culturelles/Cooperation%20culturelles.php>

<sup>117</sup> Kessab, A. and Benslimane, D. (2013), above cited n94

<sup>118</sup> Ibid

intangible cultural heritage in 2009, the Maghreb countries jointly decided to hold a consultation meeting on the measures to be taken to safeguard the shared intangible heritage, which would include: know-how related to the date palm, irrigation water drainage system (foggaras and khetaras), olive oil, horse and camel races, couscous, tea, the Julian agricultural end-of-year party or Yennayer and the tiffinagh alphabet<sup>119</sup>. This willingness to propose this list as World Heritage was concretised in March 2019, when Algeria, Morocco, Mauritania and Tunisia tabled a joint nomination to UNESCO for couscous to be inscribed on the World Heritage.

Thus, the intangible cultural heritage appears ultimately to be a solid ground for cooperation between the Maghreb countries. According to UNESCO, these countries “share a common cultural background that needs to be identified, inventoried and safeguarded”<sup>120</sup>. Indeed, as the promotion of cultural diversity is nowadays on the agenda of the international community, intangible cultural heritage should be preserved as to strengthen regional and local identities. In doing so, it can contribute to job creation, and generate incomes and resources, both in the private and public sectors<sup>121</sup>. All in all, the intangible cultural heritage is a first step towards an integrated AMU. However, further cultural developments of the Arab Maghreb will remain difficult if the governments of the AMU countries fail to provide sufficient financial means necessary for the improvement of the artistic scene.

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<sup>119</sup> UNESCO (2009), above cited n79

<sup>120</sup> Ibid

<sup>121</sup> Ibid

## Conclusion

This contribution proposed to assess the AMU from three perspectives, political, economic and cultural, namely because they are all inextricably linked. Political appeasement could see the birth of new economic partnerships within the Arab Maghreb countries, which could lead to an increase in growth, yields, intra-regional trade and trigger job creation. If the AMU member countries commit to work for economic and (then) financial integration, it would create a regional market of nearly 100 million people. The region would be more attractive for foreign direct investment, reduce the costs of intra-regional trade and capital and labor flows, and improve the efficiency of resource allocation. It would also strengthen the Maghreb's position on the world markets by being able to speak with one voice with international trade partners. These new intra-regional partnerships could in turn improve people's living conditions and appease the climate of mistrust among the civil society. Ultimately, by having a more stable economic situation, state institutions would be more inclined to increase budget allocation for education and culture. The intangible cultural heritage plays a significant role in the Maghreb societies, thus providing a solid ground for cooperation. By bringing together the AMU countries around a common historical legacy, this could give a momentum for the realisation of a greater integration process.

However, until today, the AMU still faces a plethora of challenges, from a political, economic and cultural perspective. The record that can be done in 2019 is therefore mixed on at least six points. Firstly, relations between Morocco and Algeria around the conflict in Western Sahara continue to seriously jeopardise the negotiation process. The prospects for resolving the conflict are all the more limited as it is a long-standing conflict, mixing geopolitical and nationalist aspirations. The two countries have left the UN to resolve the dispute, but the task is far from being accomplished. Two years after the departure of the American Christopher Ross, it is now the German Horst Köhler who leaves office, leaving doubts about the tools that remain available to the UN. Nevertheless, the new Envoy of the UN could also bring unprecedented solutions to litigation. Secondly, the efforts of the Algerian population for the departure of all the figures of the system who accompanied the former president during his twenty years in power, and the setting up of a transition not locked by the army, could lead to a new power in place more inclined to bring a lasting solution at the negotiating table. Thirdly, the crisis in Libya also has its share of responsibility in the failure of the integration of the AMU countries. As long as stable institutions are not established, it seems ambitious to develop a unified strategy and a national position on the solutions to revive the AMU from a Libyan perspective.



(L'Economiste Maghrébin, 2019)<sup>122</sup>

Fourthly, with elections scheduled in Mauritania (22 June 2019) and Tunisia (10 November 2019), the national strategies of both countries for the AMU are likely to reshape the old dynamics. Fifthly, the severe economic situation of the AMU countries strongly reinforces the idea that an Arab Maghreb union could greatly improve the economic situation of all the countries concerned, particularly through increased integration and inter-regional trade. To achieve this, the development of new infrastructures seems inevitable but not unthinkable. Nevertheless, it will be necessary to seriously reconsider the opening of the border between Morocco and Algeria. Finally, the cultural, linguistic and religious heritage of the AMU countries makes it a valuable asset for strengthening ties between the Arab peoples of North Africa and for reviving the hopes of a unified entity as advocated in the Treaty of Marrakech.

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<sup>122</sup> Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and Mauritania submitting to the Secretariat of the 2003 UNESCO Convention a joint file entitled "Knowledge, know-how and practices related to the production and consumption of Couscous".

## *BIC Recommendations:*

### To the Arab Maghreb Union Member States:

- Given the previous efforts that were made to revive the search for a solution for Western Sahara, to pursue their efforts and work in an increasing spirit of compromise while finally addressing sensitive issues;
- Because of the closure of the borders between Algeria and Morocco, to look for new alternative routes for intra-regional trade in order to reduce the costs of imports and exports from the European ports;
- To work on economic complementarity, as the only way to build an integrated market;
- To benefit from their close cultural ties to build up networks of artists and writers and develop a common Maghreb repertoire of literature and arts;
- To open up to each other culture by establishing cultural centers in the rest of the region. For instance, Algeria should open an Algerian cultural center in Tunisia and vice versa;
- To take the example of the Erasmus + programme of the EU by developing a joint university exchange programme aiming at building partnerships between the universities of each AMU countries and encouraging students to discover neighbouring countries. This could greatly participate in the expansion of the Maghreb education system, which could in turn bring greater international recognition.

### To the Secretary General of the Arab Maghreb Union:

- To design an Action Plan that includes long-term provisions, which are realistic and reasonable, so that countries experimenting transitional period have room of maneuver to implement them properly;
- To further promote and develop the Trans-Maghreb railway lines and highways projects, as solid grounds for regional development and integration.

### To the Government of Tunisia:

- To continue to play a mediating role while pushing for the maintenance of the seventh AMU summit.

To the United Nations:

- Despite UN Special Envoy Horst Köhler's resignation in late May 2019, to maintain the third round table of negotiations scheduled for 2019;
- To precauciously appoint a new Envoy for the Western Sahara in agreement with all the parties involved – Morocco, the Polisario, Algeria and Mauritania – in order to install a climate of trust and good will.

To the European Union:

- As a solid example of regional economic integration, to encourage and promote intra-regional trade between the AMU countries. For instance, the EU should organise multilateral trade dialogue between the AMU countries and create a long-term strategic vision focussed on equal partnership.

To the Governments of China and Russia:

- To encourage and promote intra-regional trade between the AMU countries. For instance, because China and Russia are two of the biggest external trade partners of the region, they should include provisions that promote intra-regional trade in their bilateral agreements with the countries of the AMU.

Annex - Non-Exhaustive List of All the Official Sources Relevant  
to the Analysis of the Arab Maghreb Union

Date	Type of source	Main purpose
4 August 1986	Agreement between Morocco and Mauritania	Free exchange of products originating in and coming from both countries
10 June 1988	Declaration of Zeralda	Settlement of a Committee to control the means to achieve the unity of the Arab Maghreb
17 February 1989	Treaty of Marrakech	Establishment of the Arab Maghreb Union
03 October 1991	Agreement on Trade and Tariff between the AMU countries	Approval of the principles and rules for the establishment of a Customs Union
29 April 1991	UN Security Council Resolution 690	Establishment of the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO)
11 November 1992	AMU Convention	Establishment of the Arab Maghreb Prize for Cultural Creation
11 November 1992	AMU Convention	Establishment of cultural cooperation between the AMU countries
04 February 1994	AMU Declaration	Creation of a Maghreb Free Trade Area between the AMU
04 February 1994	AMU Agreement	Creation of a Maghreb National Book Council
29 April 2004	UN Security Council Resolution 1541	Extension of the mandate of the MINURSO until 31 October 2004.
11 April 2007	Initiative	Autonomy Plan proposed by the Moroccan authorities for the negotiation of a status of autonomy of the Sahara region
28 April 2017	Speech of Sabri Boukadoum, Permanent Representative of Algeria to the United Nations	Informal comments to the media on the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 2351 on the Western Sahara
27 April 2018	Speech of Omar Hilale, Permanent Representative of Morocco to the United Nations	Informal comments to the media on the adoption of the UN Security Council Resolution 2414 on the Western Sahara
6 November 2018	Speech of the King Mohammed VI	Proposal for the creation of a “joint political mechanism for dialogue and consultation”
30 April 2019	UN Security Council Resolution 2468	Extension of the MINURSO mandate until 31 October 2019

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