



19.9.2018

MISSION REPORT

following the visit to Western Sahara on 3 and 4 September 2018

Committee on International Trade

Members of the mission:

Patricia Lalonde

Heidi Hautala

Tiziana Beghin

(ALDE) (head of mission)

(Verts/ALE)

(EFDD)

1. Introduction

A delegation made up of three INTA committee members visited Western Sahara on 3 and 4 September 2018. The mission, authorised by Parliament's Conference of Presidents on 5 July 2018, was organised in the context of the preparations for Parliament's recommendation to approve the proposed agreement extending EU-Morocco trade preferences to products from Western Sahara, i.e. chiefly agricultural products (tomatoes and melons) and fishery products.

The mission programme centred on six meetings with associations representing Sahrawi civil society, two meetings with the official authorities, a meeting with a human rights association, a meeting with the French Chamber of Commerce and six field visits.

2. Summary account of meetings

The meeting with the **President of the Dakhla-Oued ed Dahab region, Mr Yanja El Khattat**, was attended by local and provincial elected representatives, members of the Regional Council, and representatives of professional bodies. According to what the delegation was told, all the region's elected representatives were Sahrawis of long standing. Mr El Khattat stressed how the region had recently developed, in particular as regards schools and hospitals, and how important economic ties were with the EU, pointing out that it would be a disaster for the region if what was referred to as the 'agricultural' agreement and the fisheries agreement were not adopted.

The Regional Director of the Moroccan Ministry for Agriculture, Mr Hassane Agdim, detailed what the region's agricultural development had involved, stating that, prior to the 1980s, there had been virtually no agricultural activity in the region (at least on a commercial level). Subsequent speakers made the same point. On the basis of 'projects' funded by the Dakhla region, there had been a significant expansion in the livestock and fruit-and-vegetables sectors, in particular as regards tomatoes and melons and camel breeding for meat and milk consumption, which used to be non-existent and would enable the region to be self-sufficient in meat. According to Mr Agdim, the projects concerned were focused on women and young people, first and foremost, through the involvement of agricultural vocational training centres. With regard to the issue of water, Mr Agdim stated that groundwater use would be rationalised thanks to the widespread introduction of drip irrigation systems. Lastly, he gave a detailed account of the project to build the Dakhla seawater desalination plant, scheduled for completion in 2020, which would have a desalination capacity of 87 000 m³ per day and be wind-powered from a 26-MW-capacity farm. According to what the delegation was told, the plant would make it possible to irrigate 5 000 ha and would create 10 000 permanent jobs.

The representative of the Moroccan Ministry for Fisheries pointed out that, in the previous year, the fish resource catch totalled 1.1 million tonnes, 90% of which had been exported, generating earnings of MAD 9 billion (or EUR 800 million). Fifty-two thousand local jobs depended on that activity. International and European environmental standards were complied with, and half the fishermen with fishing authorisations were locals.

The President of the Laâyoune-Sakia region, Mr Hamdi Ould Rachid, the Vice-President of the region, Ms Alia Hammani, and the Chair of the Regional Development Commission, Ms Oum El Fadel Daoud, all three of whom were Sahrawis, listed a large number of ‘project contracts’ funded under an integrated programme to develop the ‘southern regions’, announced by the King of Morocco in November 2015 for the period 2016-2021, which, in total, were worth MAD 77 billion (or EUR 7 billion). A presentation was given on the projects in the Laâyoune region - worth MAD 25 billion (or EUR 2.3 billion) - together with a progress report on each. The projects related to urban development, construction of an Agadir-Laâyoune-Dakhla expressway, development of farming cooperatives, emergency medical services, including purchase of a helicopter, construction of a university hospital, three health centres and a laboratory, construction of a university, construction of solar-powered fishing villages, and purchasing of craft trade materials (leather, timber, ironwork). There were also environmental projects: construction of a flood barrier and groundwater management in Smara, setting up of an 80-MW-capacity wind farm, and construction of desalination units. Combating desertification played a prominent role, too, through agricultural projects and livestock grazing areas with a solar-powered water supply point every five kilometres. In 2017, in Qatar, Laâyoune won the green-town prize awarded by the Association of Arab Towns. All those projects would prioritise hiring local people - a condition that applied to private-sector firms, too, according to Mr Rachid, who also stated that Sahrawis made up 85% of Laâyoune’s civil service. Winding up, the President stated that the aim of all those measures was also to change attitudes, i.e. to move away from tribal customs and take up cooperative practices.

Meeting with the French Chamber of Commerce in Morocco

The Chair of the French Chamber of Commerce in Morocco, Mr Philippe-Edern Klein, which opened a delegation in Laâyoune in 2017 and was organising a forum on investment in Laâyoune that would take place on 3 and 4 November 2018, gave a detailed account of prospects for French and European investors in the region. He pointed out in particular that the region should be regarded as a hub for access to the African market. The Chamber of Commerce, which received no subsidies, was helping to set up a French business school that would be located in Laâyoune and offer higher professional diplomas so as to provide qualified manpower for channelling European investment in the region. The objective was also to ensure that young people stayed in the region and did not seek to leave the country. The chamber was currently working on 45 French and European projects in the region in connection with, for instance, motor vehicle and aircraft production units, all of which had an African perspective. Mr Klein also stressed the considerable labour and training requirements that rapid development of the region gave rise to. With regard to the issue of seasonal workers, the delegation was given an assurance that most of them are Sahrawi locals. As regards the political issue of sovereignty, Mr Klein pointed out that in his view, for that to be resolved, there first had to be economic development in the territory; that would subsequently make it possible to find a political response.

Meeting with organisations representing Sahrawi civil society

Provision had been made in the delegation’s programme for meeting Sahrawi civil society organisations to discuss topics directly related to the proposed trade agreement, i.e. economic,

social and environmental questions. The meetings often went beyond those questions and also covered political issues relating to the sovereignty of Western Sahara.

There were three categories of organisations with which meetings were held: organisations critical of the Moroccan authorities, organisations that were in favour of the proposed agreement, and one organisation focusing on more participatory inclusion in the local economy. Meetings were held with all those organisations - following discussions with their representatives - in the hotels in which the delegation was staying.

One organisation with a self-declared neutral stance acknowledged that Morocco had made great efforts to develop the region, but that those measures were not specifically focused on the Sahrawi. Another association criticised overfishing, in particular by Russian trawlers, claiming that only 5% of fishing authorisations were granted to the local community. Speakers also condemned waste discharges at sea and the construction of a port in a RAMSAR area.

Organisations supporting the Polisario Front pointed out that the indigenous community accounted for only 10% of the local population and that, because of Moroccan repression, it was difficult for them to express their views, claiming that Morocco failed to observe human rights in the region and calling for the territory's independence.

Other associations, which also supported the Polisario Front, condemned what they regarded as the plundering of natural resources. Speakers maintained that the Sahrawi could not find work in the region and that the local authorities had destroyed part of the region's heritage, citing the fact that some of their associations' activists were still in prison while others had been released in the meantime. Some speakers also pointed out that, should the agreement be passed by Parliament, the Polisario Front would be entitled to take up arms again.

The delegation also met associations that highlighted the development of Western Sahara since it had been 'taken over' by Morocco, pointing up the support given to cooperatives, modernisation of sanitation in fishing villages, women's involvement in public life, and security against threats from they termed terrorist groups. One association that helped southern Sahel migrants crossing the territory on their way to the Canary Islands explained the activities it carried out, the aim of which was to integrate migrant populations into local society (e.g. working as herders for indigenous owners). One man who said that he had spent decades as a young child and teenager living in the Polisario-administered camp at Tindouf in Algeria condemned the Polisario Front's unrepresentativeness and called on the EU to end funding for the camp.

Meeting with the Chair of the National Human Rights Council (CNDH) and with the Director of the CNDH Regional Commission

At the meeting with Mr Driss El Yazami, Chair of the CNDH in Morocco and former Secretary-General of the International Federation for Human Rights, who was accompanied by Mr Mohamed Elamine Semlali, Director of the Regional Commission for the Dakhla region, the human rights situation as a whole in Morocco and Western Sahara was considered. Problems were not specific to the Dakhla and Laâyoune regions; rather, they were to be found across the board. Mr El Yazami explained how his organisation was working to resolve as

many problems as possible, voicing his willingness to take on specific cases that might come to the attention of the delegation during its mission in Western Sahara.

Field visits

Three visits took place in the Dakhla region:

Established in 2000 and specialising in seafood processing, freezing, storage and marketing, the fish canning firm '**Artere Congel**' has a storage capacity of 1 500 tonnes and freezes 120 tonnes of produce a day. It employs between 150 and 300 people, depending on the activities it carries out. Much of its frozen produce - packed on the spot - is exported to the EU. According to the manager, Mr Mouktar Joumani, who is of Sahrawi origin, the firm handles non-industrial fishery products, in particular cephalopods (octopus), sardines, mackerel and piragis, and abides by arrangements to rationalise fisheries, i.e. compliance with quotas (meaning no fishing when renewal capacities are exhausted).

The '**Ajban Dakhla**' and '**Tawarta Dakhla**' women's cooperatives, made up of Sahrawi villagers, focus on the production of 'fromage frais' from camel's milk and of couscous. The process of making camel's milk 'fromage frais' was explained to the delegation; it was pointed out that the product has been presented at various international fairs. The product has protected geographical indication status. The individuals met complained about the fact that, as the milk used is not sterilised, there is no access to the European market. Not only the couscous production unit, but also the cheese production unit, the construction of which was funded by the Moroccan Ministry for Agriculture, are solar-powered.

Set up by 15 Sahrawi agricultural engineers, seven of whom are women, the '**Ajida**' fruit-and-vegetables production site is made up of huge greenhouses containing a vast number of arrays of vertically growing cherry tomatoes. Melons are also grown. The producers explained to the delegation how the drip irrigation system worked, making judicious use of groundwater. The bulk of what is produced is intended for the European market; some of it appears to pass through Agadir, 1 200 km away from Dakhla, which increases production costs and makes products less competitive than those produced in the Agadir region. Under the proposed agreement, accordingly, the cooperative concerned would be able to pack its products on the spot and export them from the Dakhla region, which, according to what the delegation was told, would create more jobs, in particular skilled jobs.

Three visits took place in the Laâyoune region:

The '**Phosboucraa**' phosphate production plant near Laâyoune was set up in 1962 by the Spanish corporation 'Instituto Nacional de Industrial', which held 35% of the equity until 2002, when the Moroccan state-owned enterprise 'Office Chérifien des Phosphates' became the sole shareholder. The plant was loss-making for a long time, but now operates at a surplus and reinvests all its earnings in its local activities (according to the information given to the delegation). Geological characteristics make phosphate mining conditions in the Western Sahara region difficult, meaning that use has to be made of modern technologies (costing two and a half times as much as in Morocco). The site covers a large area and includes a wharf and a seawater desalination plant. According to the figures presented, and apparently certified by KPMG, 75% of the current workforce of 2 200 are locals. The plant is the Laâyoune region's leading private-sector employer. A presentation was given on a development

programme for the period 2014-2022 - worth MAD 20.2 billion, or EUR 1.85 billion - the principal aim of which is to increase phosphate production, storage and processing capacity and to construct a new fertiliser production platform. Under the programme, which should create 5 000 jobs, it is also planned to build a modern housing district for the new workers, including day-care centres, a swimming pool and a research hub for 40 000 students and researchers by 2022. Though raw phosphate is not subject to EU customs duties and is therefore not affected by the agreement under consideration, mineral phosphate fertilisers are, and preferential rates would apply to them. Lastly, a presentation was given on the activities carried out by the Phosboucraa Foundation for the local population; they extend to education centres, healthcare, mobile hospitals, animal treatment, preservation of the Sahrawi heritage, urban development and women's rights.

The '**Nagjir Group**' processing and canning plant specialises in preserving sardines and mackerel. Tins for many of the brands commonly sold in Europe are on display at the entrance to the plant. According to the manager, Mr Sis Badr El Moussaoui, all employees are locals.

The '**Halib Sakia El Hamra**' cattle cooperative, located in the middle of the desert, was set up a number of years ago by 52 breeders, all of Sahrawi origin, so as to provide its members with what they required for their activities (and so that they did not have to go all the way to Agadir): storage, UHT sterilisation and marketing of cow's milk, fodder suppliers, tractors, quality inspections and an artificial-insemination scheme. Total milk production of the cooperative in 2017 was 8 million litres from its 2 000 cows spread out over its members' plots of land. The cooperative has also set up a primary school and provides school supplies and transport for its members' children. It is the second cattle cooperative in Western Sahara; the first was set up about 20 years ago.

3. Conclusions and follow up.

- The information obtained during this mission reflects the views of the individuals met and is not based on incontrovertible facts. What it shows, however, is that there are differing views on the desirability of a trade agreement on Western Sahara products: one view is that a political solution must be a precondition for economic measures; the other that economic support must continue to be provided in tandem with the political process;
- The information in this report supplements the conclusions set out by the Commission and the European External Action Service in their joint report dated 11 June 2018;
- The details set out in this report can be taken into account by the INTA committee, and by the committees asked for their opinions (AFET, AGRI and PECH), in the draft recommendation for approval and the draft resolution accompanying the recommendation;
- This report may also provide input for the members of the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries.

**COMMISSION DU COMMERCE INTERNATIONAL (INTA):
MISSION AU SAHARA OCCIDENTAL
2 - 5 Septembre 2018**

Programme final

Dimanche, 2 Septembre 2018: Arrivées individuelles à Dakhla

- 23.45 **Atterrissage du vol en provenance de Casablanca à l'aéroport de Dakhla**

Transfert: Hôtel Buena Vista, Boulevard Mohammed V, Dakhla 73000

Lundi, 3 Septembre 2018: Dakhla

Hôtel Buena Vista :

- 8.00-8.15 **Réunion préparatoire de la délégation**

- 8.15-8.45 **Réunion avec des associations représentatives de la société civile sahraouie: « Association SALAM pour la Protection de l'Environnement et le Développement durable » (Mr Ahmed Bazaid Cheick El Mami) et « Sahrawi Committee » (Mr Cherif Mohamed)**

- 8.45-9.15 **Réunion avec une association représentative de la société civile sahraouie: « Organisation sahraouie contre la torture de Dakhla » (Mr El Mami Amar Salem et quatre autres représentants)**

Transfert 15 mns

- 9.30-10.30 **« Artere Congel » (Directeur sahraoui : Mr Mouktar Joumani)**

Transfert 15 mns

- 11.00-13.00 **Réunion avec le Président de la région Dakhla-Oued ed Dahab, Mr Yanja El Khattat, les membres du Conseil régional et les Présidents des collectivités locales**

- 13.30-15.00 **Déjeuner avec le Wali (Gouverneur) de la région, Mr Lamine Benomar**

Transfert 15 mns

- 15.30-16.15 **Visite de deux coopératives féminines sahraouies spécialisées dans la**

fabrication de fromage à base de lait de chamelle: « Ajban Dakhla » et de semoule de couscous : « Tawarta Dakhla »

Transfert 40 mns

- 17.00-18.00 **Visite d'une ferme de primeur sahraouie spécialisée dans la production de tomates et de melons : « AJIDA »**

Transfert 40 mns vers l'hôtel Buena Vista :

- 19.00-19.30 **Réunion avec le Président du Conseil National des Droits de l'Homme au Maroc (CNDH), Mr Driss El Yazami, et le Président de la Commission Régionale des Droits de l'Homme de la région de Dakhla, Mr Mohamed Elamine Senglali**

Transfert 5 mns vers l'aéroport de Dakhla

- 20.30-21.30 **Vol Dakhla - Laâyoune**

Transfert: Hôtel Parador, Rue Okba Ibn Nafih, Laâyoune 70000

Mardi 4 Septembre 2018: Laâyoune

Transfert 15 mns

- 9.00-10.30 **Réunion avec le Président de la région Laâyoune-Sakia el Hamra, Mr Hamdi Ould Rachid, la Vice-Présidente de la région, Mme Alia Hammani, et la Présidente de la Commission de l'Aménagement du Territoire du Conseil régional, Mme Oum El Fadel Daoud**

Transfert 15 mns

Hôtel Parador

- 11.00-13.00 **Réunion avec le Président de la Chambre Française de Commerce et d'Industrie du Maroc, Mr Philippe-Edern Klein, le Directeur à l'Appui aux Investisseurs et à la Création d'Entreprises, Mr Khalid Idrissi Kaitouni, et la Chargée d'Affaires de la Délégation de la Chambre à Laâyoune, Mme Mimouna Tolba, suivie d'un déjeuner de travail**
- 13.00-13.45 **Rencontre avec une association représentative de la société civile sahraouie :
Committee for the Support of the Peace Plan and the Protection of Natural Resources in Western Sahara - CISPRON (Mr Ali Salem Babait)
et deux autres représentants**
- 13.45-15.10 **Rencontre avec une association représentative de la société civile**

sahraouie :

Sahrawi Association for the Control over Natural Resources and Environmental Protection - AMRPENWS (Mr Lahcen Dalil) et huit autres représentants

-15.10-16.00 Rencontre avec des associations représentatives de la société civile sahraouie :

Local Coordination of the Unemployed Sahrawi Graduates (Mr Brahim Bouchalga), Objective Group for the Sahrawi Jobless Cadres (Mr Hasan Abba) and League of Defenders of Sahrawi Political Prisoners (Mr Adderahman Zayou) et quatorze autres représentants

Transfert 30 mns

- 16.30-17.45 Visite des installations industrielles de l'usine de production de phosphate « Phosboucraa » (Directeur de l'usine : Mr Mohamed Chehtane)

Transfert 15 mns

- 18.00-18.45 Visite d'une unité de transformation et congélation du poisson « Nagjir Group » (Directeur sahraoui : Mr Sidi Badr El Moussaoui)

Transfert 15 mns

- 19.00-20.00 Visite d'une coopérative sahraouie de valorisation de lait de vache « Halib Sakia El Hamra » (Président : Mr Soubai Dahane)

Transfert 1 heure 30 mns

- 21.30-23.30 Rencontre et dîner avec huit associations représentatives de la société civile sahraouie : Association « Les amis de Tarfaya » (Mr Mrabih Rabou Shaibata), Association Sahraouie pour le Développement durable (Mr Sidi Ahmed Hormatalah), Association des Handicapés de Laâyoune (Mr Mahjoub Doua), Association « Saki El Hamra » de soutien aux Migrants (Mr Abdelkabir Taghia), Ligue du Sahara pour la démocratie et les Droits de l'Homme (Mr Hammada El Beihi), Observatoire du Sahara pour la Paix et la Démocratie (Mme Aicha Douihi), Institut du Sud pour les Études et Recherches Stratégiques (Mme Mina Leghzal) et Comité indépendant des Droits de l'Homme (Mme Filali Hammadi)

Transfert 1 heure vers l'hôtel

Mercredi 5 Septembre 2018: Retour à Bruxelles

- 9.00 Point de rencontre dans le lobby de l'hôtel et départ collectif

Transfert pour l'aéroport de Laâyoune et décollage du vol à 10.35 vers Casablanca