

EUROPEAN UNION ENERGY POLICY ON THE EXTERNAL MARKET: TOOLS AND OPPORTUNITIES. CASE STUDY: EU'S ENERGY RELATIONS WITH THE KINGDOM OF MOROCCO

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Abstract

Energy-related issues occupy a central place on the political agenda of the European Union, so it is no wonder that several studies in the field of international relations focus on this EU policy. However, most of them tend to follow the subject from the perspective of the Union's need to cover its energy deficit by identifying new sources of supply, neglecting the issue of promoting sustainable development at the level of its foreign policy. Starting from these considerations, the present study aims to analyse the energy cooperation between the Union and the Kingdom of Morocco, following the instruments through which European officials try to boost renewable energy projects. The research will also highlight the opportunities in terms of achieving the foreign policy objective previously exposed, within the bilateral dynamics between the two actors. In order to assure a comprehensive analysis of the subject, the research will be conducted based on Robert Keohane theories regarding cooperation and international institutions.

Keywords: *European Union, Morocco, energy, policy, strategy.*

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INTRODUCTION

The European Union has assumed an increasingly important role internationally through its foreign policy, mainly based on elements of soft power. The central position occupied by the EU on a global scale cannot be contested considering the value of its gross domestic product and the diplomatic instruments through which it has strengthened its relations with other actors. For these reasons, the Union is a key element in promoting the transition to the use of forms of sustainable energy worldwide. Starting from the above considerations, the importance of analysing the way in which the EU tries to promote its energy policy goals externally, as well as the opportunities for such an approach, becomes clear.

The literature that focuses on the EU external energy market is extensive since the scientific approaches on the subject were driven by the recent events in Eastern Europe that put European officials in a position to speed up the process of diversifying supply sources to reduce energy dependencies on the Russian Federation. However, there was a tendency to neglect the other EU's foreign policy interests in this area, such as encouraging sustainable development. Thus, the analysis of the relations between the Union and an actor like Morocco, which does not represent a possible source of supply (in terms of resources such as oil and natural gas), can constitute an element of innovation at the level of research in the field of international relations.

The present study therefore follows the energy dynamics between the European Union and Morocco, in order to find an answer to the following questions: 1. What are the instruments through which European officials try to boost renewable energy projects on the external market? and 2. What are the opportunities in terms of achieving the foreign policy objective previously exposed?

In order to ensure a comprehensive research of the subject, three main themes will be pursued:

(I) First of all, we must consider what are the energy objectives of the European Union on the external market, as well as the correlation between the energy policy and other policies of the actor. In other words, the energy issue covers several areas of competence of the EU, and it is not enough to focus strictly on the area in question. Thus, the first part of the study will also cover environmental and foreign policy, both of which are closely related to energy strategy.

(II) Secondly, in order to be able to identify the opportunities regarding the promotion of these objectives in the relationship with the Kingdom of Morocco, it is necessary to see what are the energy characteristics of the state, respectively (1) the availability of raw materials, (2) the energy project opportunities ' determined by the geographical factors of the country and (3) the actor's energy policies.

(III) Finally, the instruments and methods by which the Union sustains renewable energy development projects at the level of relations with Morocco will be followed. In this sense, both multilateral partnerships between the European Union and the countries of the Maghreb region (such as Union for the Mediterranean), as well as the steps taken at the level of bilateral relations of the two actors, will be taken into account.

METHODOLOGY

In order to find an answer to the two questions mentioned above, in the paper I turned, from a methodological point of view to the case study. Even though there is no generally accepted definition of this tool, the case study can be understood as an intensive analysis of a person, a group of people or a unit¹ which allows the researcher to elaborate hypotheses that can be further explored in other research². Thus, the case study starts from studying a particular phenomenon in order to formulate ideas that can be applied to understand other similar issues.

The sources of documentation used in the present research can be divided into two main categories: primary and secondary. In the case of the former, these include a series of official documents and sources that provided the necessary information for analysing the relationship between the two actors. This covers the websites and descriptive sheets of the European Union from which data on relevant policies for this study were extracted. In addition, platforms that ensure transparency of EU initiatives and expenses (such as the Union for the Mediterranean website) provided a good starting point for analysing the Union's promotion of renewable energy on the external market.

¹ Roberta Heale, Alison Twycross, "What is a case study?", *Evidence-based nursing*, no.1, 2018, pp. 7-8.

² Kendra Cherry, *What is a case study?*, 2022, [<https://www.verywellmind.com/how-to-write-a-psychology-case-study-2795722>], 28 July 2023.

Moreover, in order to gather data on Morocco's interest in renewable energy issues, documents issued by authorities with responsibilities in the field, such as the Moroccan Agency for Energy Efficiency (AMEE), the National Office of Electricity and Drinking Water (ONEE), the National Federation of Electricity and Renewable Energies (FENELEC), and The Research Institute for Solar Energy and New Energies (IRESEN) were used. Additionally, to gain an overview of the energy characteristics of the Kingdom, analyses conducted by several government institutions (USA International Trade Administration), international associations (International Hydropower Association (IHA)), and research institutions (Oxford Business Group) were followed.

Last but not least, press articles written by journalists working for reputable media companies (such as the BBC) helped to extensively document Morocco's efforts in developing solar, hydraulic and wind energy projects, as well as the financial contribution of the European Union for their implementation.

The secondary sources include the research works in the fields of international relations, energy policy and foreign policy, relevant for the present article.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Before starting to apply the chosen structure, it is necessary to define the theoretical issues which stay at the basis of the analysis. In this regard, Robert Keohane's perspective on the concepts of cooperation and international institutions provides a solid starting point for this research.

Basically, the researcher embraces the neorealist idea of an anarchic international system, which results in the impossibility of achieving harmony among actors on the global stage. However, according to Keohane, anarchy does not preclude the possibility of cooperation, which occurs when actors identify common interests. More precisely, he argues that actors tend to cooperate in order to attain greater benefits than they would achieve by acting independently³. Taking this into account, it can be asserted that interdependencies among actors in terms of the pursuit of their interests have a beneficial effect on cooperation. Furthermore, interdependencies can,

³ Robert O Keohane, *After Hegemony - Cooperation and Discord in the World Political Economy*, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1984, p. 53.

in turn, be intensified through the means of international institutions⁴ like treaties, bilateral agreements, international organisations, conventions, partnerships, and agreements⁵.

Thus, the idea behind the choice of the structure outlined in the methodological segment becomes clearer: essentially, the first and second parts of the analysis assist us in comprehending the interests of the two actors concerning sustainable development, which forms the basis for identifying collaboration opportunities. The final part focuses on international institutions that facilitate the positive relations between the European Union and the Kingdom of Morocco in the energy area.

CORRELATION BETWEEN ENERGY, ENVIRONMENTAL AND FOREIGN POLICY

The logical beginning of this scientific approach consists in exposing the energy policy goals of the European Union. In this regard, the official website of the European Parliament provides a concise presentation of the Union's interests in the energy field, which can be summarised in the following five points:

“(I) Diversify Europe’s sources of energy, ensuring energy security through solidarity and cooperation between EU countries; (II) ensure the functioning of a fully integrated internal energy market, enabling the free flow of energy through the EU through adequate infrastructure and without technical or regulatory barriers; (III) improve energy efficiency and reduce dependence on energy imports, cut emissions, and drive jobs and growth; (IV) decarbonise the economy and move towards a low-carbon economy in line with the Paris Agreement; (V) promote research in low-carbon and clean energy technologies, and prioritise research and innovation to drive the energy transition and improve competitiveness⁶.”

The objectives set out above can be classified into two main categories: one includes the first three points, considering the issue of ensuring the energy needed by the Union, or, in other words, the energy security. The latter fall into the second category, that of sustainable development and decarbonization of

⁴ *Op. Cit.*, p. 215.

⁵ John Duffield, “What are International Institutions?”, *International Studies Review*, nr. 9, 2007, pp. 1-22.

⁶ *Energy policy: general principles*, 2022, [<https://www.europarl.europa.eu/factsheets/en/sheet/68/energy-policy-general-principles>], 17 June 2023.

the economy. Thus, the connection between energy and environmental policies is obvious, especially considering the fact that, as stated in the General Union Environment Action Program to 2030, the EU aims to speed up the transition to a climate-neutral, resource-efficient economy⁷. Moreover, one of the climate actions identified within the European Green Deal involves encouraging sustainable industry as a key element of the green transition⁸.

However, addressing climate issues through the green economy is not merely an aspiration achievable solely through regional measures; it requires a global approach. Indeed, as researchers Sebastian Oberthür, Claire Dupont, and Javier Cifuentes-Faura assert and demonstrate, EU climate policies have progressively become a source of inspiration for other actors⁹. Still, being a model of sustainable development is not enough to comprehensively address the green transition on an international level, as most states and organisations do not have the resources of the Union. For this very reason, the EU has taken on the role of a global leader in climate strategy¹⁰, through its external policy instruments. In this context, three main factors influence the success of achieving energy objectives: (1) the consistency and specificity of the external energy policy and its goals and interests; (2) the diplomatic apparatus and policy tools; and (3) external recognition of the EU energy actorness by third parties¹¹. The first two, as will be presented in the final part of the analysis, are closely interconnected since energy market interests are pursued through a series of diplomatic instruments created to foster positive relations between the European Union and other actors. Regarding the last factor, it is necessary to mention one aspect: the energy characteristics of the Kingdom of Morocco, as well as the vision of Moroccan officials regarding the advantages of developing an economy based on sustainable energy, strongly influence how the Kingdom

⁷ *Environment action programme to 2030*, 2022, [https://environment.ec.europa.eu/strategy/environment-action-programme-2030_en, 17] June 2023.

⁸ *European Green Deal*, 2020, [<https://eur-lex.europa.eu/EN/legal-content/summary/european-green-deal.html>], 19 June 2023.

⁹ Sebastian Oberthür, Claire Dupont, "The European Union's international climate leadership: towards a grand climate strategy?", in *Journal of European Public Policy*, no.7, 2021, pp. 1095-1114.

¹⁰ Javier Cifuentes-Faura, "European Union policies and their role in combating climate change over the years", in *Air Quality, Atmosphere & Health*, no. 8, 2022, pp. 1333-1340.

¹¹ Luka Tichy, Zbyněk Dubský, Jan Mazač, "The external energy actorness of the EU towards Egypt", in *Energy Strategy Reviews*, 2021, pp. 1-11.

perceives the energy opportunities arising from cooperation with the Union. Hence, the aforementioned matters shall form the focal themes analysed in the next section.

MOROCCO ENERGY CHARACTERISTICS

According to data retrieved from the official website of the International Trade Administration, Morocco's energy sector is heavily reliant on imported hydrocarbons¹². The matter at hand highlights the inadequacy of resources required to meet the energy demand within the state's territory, as well as the necessity for implementing renewable energy projects. In this regard, the country's geographic positioning in a Mediterranean climate zone represents an opportunity for the development of wind and solar energy. Furthermore, according to the 2018 Hydropower Status Report developed by the International Hydropower Association, Morocco possesses significant potential to enhance its hydropower storage capacity and bolster its green energy production¹³.

Moreover, Moroccan officials have consistently demonstrated openness to investments in the three aforementioned areas, as the state's renewable energy objectives are the most ambitious in the region¹⁴. The validity of this statement is supported by a series of factors. Firstly, Morocco developed the first wind farm in Africa in the late 1990s in the El Koudia El Beida area. Additionally, the country has made substantial investments in the Noor-Ouarzazate Complex, which stands as the largest solar power plant in the world. Also, Morocco boasts 26 hydropower stations with a combined capacity of 1360 MW, including Al Wahda, the second-largest dam in Africa¹⁵. The positive impact of these achievements becomes evident when examining the most recent data on the state's energy production. In 2021, the share of hydroelectricity reached 16.14%, wind accounted for 13.37%, and solar

¹² *Morocco - Country Commercial Guide*, 2022, [<https://www.trade.gov/country-commercial-guides/morocco-energy#:~:text=At%20present%2C%20Morocco%20has%20an,wind%20and%201.3%20from%20hydropower>], 20 June 2023.

¹³ *Country profile-Morocco*, 2018, [<https://www.hydropower.org/country-profiles/Morocco>], 20 June 2018.

¹⁴ Michael Hochberg, "Renewable energy growth in Morocco: an example for the region renewable energy growth in Morocco", *Middle East Institute*, 2016, pp.1-8.

¹⁵ Aida Alami, *How Morocco went big on solar energy*, 2019, [<https://www.bbc.com/future/article/20211115-how-morocco-led-the-world-on-clean-solar-energy>], 23 June 2023.

contributed 7.58% to the overall energy production in Morocco¹⁶. In other words, starting from the year 2021, renewable energy began to represent a quarter of the total energy produced in the Kingdom.

Secondly, there is a series of evidence suggesting that investments in sustainable development will continue, given that as early as 2009, Moroccan officials aimed at increasing the share of renewable energies in the national energy network 42 percent by 2030¹⁷. In addition to this fact, a study conducted by the Autonomous University of Madrid revealed that the state's endeavours in the discussed field will have a strong positive impact on the GDP and employment in the long term¹⁸.

The last but not least aspect that must be discussed is related to how the state manages sustainable development projects with the support of institutions responsible for this domain. Two such institutions are the Moroccan Agency for Energy Efficiency (AMEE) and the National Office of Electricity and Drinking Water (ONEE), both of which are tasked with overseeing the implementation of government policies. More specifically, AMEE has the role of supporting state projects aimed at reducing energy dependence through the promotion of energy efficiency¹⁹, while ONEE is responsible for managing the distribution networks of electrical and hydraulic resources.²⁰ In addition to these, the National Federation of Electricity and Renewable Energies (FENELEC) provides a collaborative platform for actors involved in the green transition process, representing the interests of its members²¹. Furthermore, in order to promote applied research

¹⁶ *Hydropower plays a growing role in the development of renewables in Morocco*, 2020, [<https://oxfordbusinessgroup.com/reports/morocco/2016-report/economy/pumped-up-hydropower-plays-an-increasingly-significant-role-in-the-renewables-segment>], 23 June 2023.

¹⁷ *Country profile-Morocco*, 2018, [<https://www.hydropower.org/country-profiles/Morocco>], 20 June 2018.

¹⁸ Rafael de Acre, "A simulation of the economic impact of renewable energy development in Morocco." *Energy Policy*", *Energy Policy*, 2012, pp. 335-245.

¹⁹ *Moroccan Agency for Energy Efficiency (AMEE)*, [<https://www.amee.ma/en/node/113>], 17 June 2023.

²⁰ *National Office of Electricity and Drinking Water (ONEE)*, [<https://www.devex.com/organizations/national-office-of-electricity-and-drinking-water-onee-morocco-139576>], 17 June 2023.

²¹ *National Federation of Electricity and Renewable Energies (FENELEC)*, [<https://www.fenelec.com/English/topic/index.html>], 17 June 2023.

and collaborative innovation projects²², Research Institute for Solar Energy and New Energies (IRESEN) was established in 2011.

Thus, given the information exposed in this section, it can be mentioned that the lack of energy resources and the opportunities arising from development of green projects motivates the Kingdom officials to invest in renewable energy.

EU-MOROCCO COOPERATION TOOLS

When referring to the instruments through which cooperation between the EU and Morocco is achieved in the energy sector, a primary aspect to consider is the Union for the Mediterranean. Established as an initiative to continue and strengthen the action directions set within the Euro-Mediterranean Partnership, the organisation aims to exploit the potential for sustainable development in the region.²³ More specifically, as mentioned on the official website, the Union for the Mediterranean acts as a unique platform to facilitate and promote regional dialogue and cooperation, as well as concrete projects and initiatives in the fields of Energy and Climate Action²⁴. One of the concrete outcomes of the organisation was the establishment of the SEMed Private Renewable Energy Framework (SPREF), which provides financial and technical support for the implementation of renewable energy projects²⁵. Currently, there are a total of 5 beneficiary states of the project, among which, Morocco is included.

In addition to these, since 2007, the Africa-EU Energy Partnership was established as a collaborative forum aimed at encouraging joint programs on key energy issues of interest to both Europe and Africa²⁶. Furthermore, during the sixth EU-African Union summit, The Africa-EU Green Energy Initiative

²² *Research Institute for Solar Energy and New Energies (IRESEN)*, [<https://iresen.org/institute>], 17 June 2023.

²³ *Energy & Climate Action*, [<https://ufmsecretariat.org/what-we-do/energy-and-climate-action/>], 19 July 2023.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

²⁵ *SEMed Private Renewable Energy Framework (SPREF)*, [<https://ufmsecretariat.org/project/semed-spref/#:~:text=The%20SPREF%20helped%20countries%20meet,%2C%20Morocco%2C%20Tunisia%20and%20Lebanon>]., 19 July 2023.

²⁶ *Sub-Saharan Africa, 2022*, [https://energy.ec.europa.eu/topics/international-cooperation/key-partner-countries-and-regions/sub-saharan-africa_en], 02 August 2023.

was established with the aim of fostering the economic development of the African continent through investments in renewable energy²⁷.

In any case, the main ways through which the European Union seeks to promote its foreign policy objectives regarding renewable energy remain bilateral agreements.²⁸ Over time, the EU has repeatedly contributed to Morocco's sustainable development projects, resulting in numerous initiatives in the relations between the two actors, all of which cannot be covered in this article. Therefore, we will focus only on the most recently implemented collaboration instruments, which also represent the most significant steps in energy cooperation.

We will use the year 2019 as our starting point, as it marked the fourteenth meeting of the EU-Morocco Association Council. During the debates, discussions on sustainable development dominated the agenda, covering topics such as renewable energy, energy efficiency, biodiversity, and the sustainable use of natural resources²⁹. In the same year, the European Union granted €106.5 million for the Noor Ouarzazate complex through the Neighbouring Investment Facility (NIF).³⁰ Three years later, a new collaboration instrument, namely the EU-Morocco Green Partnership was introduced to support their common goals of becoming low-carbon, climate-resilient economies, and transitioning to a green economy³¹. Moreover, through this partnership, the two parties aim to foster innovative, sustainable, job-creating, and environmentally friendly projects³². Once again, the agreed-upon matters were supported through concrete actions. In March 2023, the European

²⁷ *Ibidem*.

²⁸ Laura Basagni, "How the EU Green Deal Shapes the Agenda for the Mediterranean", in Tiziana della Ragione (ed.), *Anticipating and mitigating side effects: the road to a successful green transition in the Euro-Mediterranean region*, Barcelona: *European Institute of the Mediterranean*, 2022, p. 17.

²⁹ Amine Bennis, "Power Surge: How the European Green Deal Can Succeed in Morocco and Tunisia", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 2021, pp. 1-20.

³⁰ *Morocco: European Investment Bank funds one of the biggest solar power complexes in the world*, 2019, [<https://south.euneighbours.eu/news/morocco-european-investment-bank-funds-one-biggest-solar-power-complexes/>], 1 August 2023.

³¹ *The EU and Morocco launch the first Green Partnership on energy, climate and the environment ahead of COP 27*, 2022, [https://neighbourhood-enlargement.ec.europa.eu/news/eu-and-morocco-launch-first-green-partnership-energy-climate-and-environment-ahead-cop-27-2022-10-18_en], 1 August 2023.

³² *Ibidem*.

Union launched a new cooperation program with Morocco, investing millions of euros in the green transition, thereby supporting the so-called green entrepreneurship sector.

In addition to these, the European Investment Bank, commonly referred to as the EU climate bank, has been operating in Morocco since 1979. A significant proportion of the investments made through it in the Kingdom have been in the renewable energy sector, (more specifically 30%³³) so that it can be asserted that the European Investment Bank's Representation in Morocco is the main instrument for promoting the green transition in the country,

All in all, based on the above, we can draw the following conclusions: It is clear that financial efforts play an important role in the European energy policy on the external market. At the same time, these efforts are accompanied by plans and initiatives to institutionalise the relations with Morocco, such as regional cooperation frameworks and bilateral treaties. In other words, the European energy policy on the external market is supported by two main areas, namely the economic and diplomatic ones.

CONCLUSIONS

Through this study, a comprehensive analysis of the energy relations between the European Union and Morocco has been proposed, aiming to explore the opportunities and instruments that the EU employs to promote sustainable development in the Kingdom. The ideas of Robert Keohane on the concepts of cooperation and international institutions have been used as the theoretical framework of the research.

The first two parts of the paper have traced the interests of the actors regarding sustainable development. In the first part, the connection between the EU's energy, environmental, and foreign policies was demonstrated in order to illustrate the actor's aims in promoting alternative forms of energy globally. The second part followed the Moroccan officials' interests in developing the necessary technologies for the green transition, interests grounded in the obstacles faced in ensuring the country's energy needs. In other words, while the EU want to export its energy policy principles and has the resources required to achieve this, Morocco seeks to attract funds for its green transition projects. Thus, the congruence of the interests of the actors tends to facilitate their cooperation.

³³ *European Investment Bank (EIB)*, 2020, [https://www.eib.org/attachments/publications/la_bei_au_maroc_en.pdf], 1 August 2023.

Regarding the instruments used to promote the EU's energy interests in Morocco, it can be stated that European officials have established a series of international institutions to enhance collaboration with the Kingdom. These encompass both regional partnerships and bilateral agreements that facilitate diplomatic communication between the two actors. Moreover, diplomatic efforts are accompanied by investments in Morocco's infrastructure and green transition plans.

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