

**THE EU AND THE WESTERN SAHARA  
CONFLICT: A DIFFICULT HISTORY****AZ EU ÉS A NYUGAT-SZAHARAI  
KONFLIKTUS: EGY BONYOLULT VISZONY**KEMÉNY János<sup>1</sup>**Abstract**

The main objective of the article is to give an overview of the history of MINURSO, with a special attention to the role of EU nations played in the history of this mission. To achieve the stated goal, the author intends to give a short overview of the historical background of the conflict, how the UN got involved and how the mission was established. The article will show how the EU's interest in the Northern region of Africa changed over the years, and how the region has become strategically important for the EU. The article gives an overview of the history of MINURSO and the role of EU nations in this history. The author intends to use qualitative and quantitative methods to show the role of these nations in the history of MINURSO. On the qualitative side the author intends to give a comprehensive overview of the participating nations, their interest in the region, and how their participation can be considered as their national interest or international obligation. To underpin this argument, the author will use quantitative methods in order to showcase the contribution of these nations. In the final part of the author will draw conclusion about the EU's role.

**Keywords**

EU, Western Sahara, MINURSO, Africa, Morocco, Algeria, Polisario Front

**Absztrakt**

A tanulmány fő célkitűzése, hogy áttekintést nyújtson a MINURSO történetéről, különös figyelmet fordítva arra, hogy az egyes EU tagállamok milyen szerepet játszottak a történetében. Ennek elérése érdekében a konfliktus rövid történeti áttekintése után az ENSZ szerepvállalás létrejöttét mutatja be a cikk. Ezt követően a fontos EU tagállamok észak-afrikai érdekeinek és azok változásainak bemutatására kerül sor, és hogy hogyan értékelődött fel a régió az EU számára. Ezután a MINURSO története és az EU abban játszott szerepe kerül taglalásra. A szerző kvalitatív és kvantitatív módszereket alkalmaz az egyes országok MINURSO történetében játszott szerepének bemutatására. Kvalitatív szempontból a szerző átfogó képet ad a résztvevő országokról, regionális érdekeikről, és a részvételük mennyire nemzeti érdekként és mennyire nemzetközi kötelezettségként értelmezhető. Az érvelés alátámasztására a szerző kvantitatív adatokat is közöl az egyes országok szerepvállalásának bemutatására. A tanulmány utolsó részében pedig a szerző konklúziót a bemutatott adatokra támaszkodva konklúziót alkot az EU szerepéről.

**Kulcsszavak**

EU, Nyugat-Szahara, MINURSO, Afrika, Marokkó, Algéria, Polisario Front

**INTRODUCTION**

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The objective of the current chapter is to introduce the positions of the European Union (EU) to the reader in the conflict in Western Sahara and its relations to the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO). This relationship is not as well researched as it should be, and the author aims to rectify this problem to the extent it is possible under the limitations of a book chapter.

After a short overview of the history of the conflict and the MINURSO mission, the author intends to look at EU-Western Sahara and MINURSO relationship from multiple angles: the role of the most important EU nations with interests in the region (meaning mostly France and Spain), the role of EU policies like the Euro Mediterranean Partnership Program, the role of the European Parliament etc. as well as the outstanding issues in relations between the EU and Morocco (the latter being one of the principal actors in the Western Sahara conflict). The chapter will also look at the participation of EU nations in the MINURSO mission and how this participation has changed over time.

The author hopes that with the introduction of help of these different viewpoints, a complex picture can emerge and show the sometimes-conflicted positions of the EU.

### **A SHORT HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF THE CONFLICT AND THE ROLE OF EUROPEAN POWERS**

The conflict in Western Sahara began when Spain withdrew from the territory in 1975. The UN fact finding mission sent into the region reported that the population favoured independence and the World Court at the Hague ruled that the region could hold a vote for self-determination.[1] Spain had other ideas, as it wanted to disengage very quickly. The Tripartite Madrid Accords of 14 November 1975 were meant to guarantee an orderly process, but Spain gave up the territory very quickly, which made things more difficult. The accords gave about two-thirds of the territory to Morocco and the remaining part to Mauritania. A year later, Spain agreed to hold a referendum on the future of the territory upon UN pressure. But the emerging conflict, between the native Sahrawis and the occupying forces prevented a referendum. POLISARIO (Frente Popular para la Liberacion de Saguia el-Hamra y Río de Oro; English: Popular Front for the Liberation of Saguia el-Hamra and Río de Oro) offered military resistance against the new powers on the Western Saharan territory. To underpin the Moroccan claims to the territory, Moroccan soldiers and citizens marched in their tens of thousands in an event which became known as the Green March in 1975.[2]

The Green March also had a military component and the Moroccan military units, which were aimed to crush the resistance offered by POLISARIO forces. The forces of POLISARIO were no match for the Moroccan conventional forces so these forces were able to achieve their objectives relatively quickly, but they were unable to cut off POLISARIO forces from their Algerian support.[3] As a political countermove, POLISARIO declared the formation of the Sahraoui Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). A new phase started in the war between Morocco and POLISARIO, as the latter began to rely on guerrilla tactics against the Moroccans and the Mauritians. POLISARIO was very successful against the Mauritians, as the Mauritanian Army was a relatively weak organisation. In turn, the Mauritians signed a defence pact with Morocco, and 9,000 Moroccan troops were deployed on the Mauritanian occupied part of Western Sahara. Also, the French signed a defence pact with Mauritania, and French forces provided air support for the Mauritanian Army against POLISARIO, while giving training to Mauritanian and Moroccan officers as

well. (The French also increased their support for Morocco, because it was feared Algeria could take direct military retaliation on Morocco.) Mauritania was struggling with the costs of the war and an economic crisis, and the military took over the country. But the leadership was forced to sue for peace and this led to the peace agreement in 1979, with Mauritania giving up its claims. According to the agreement Mauritania would give the territory directly to POLISARIO, but Moroccan forces seized the vacated territory.[4, p. 25-27]

POLISARIO refocused its efforts on the Moroccan forces and attacked vulnerable outposts and economically important targets, forcing the Moroccans to give up smaller outposts and reinforcing important bases. After costly losses, the Moroccans were able to take over the territory bordering Algeria, and in 1980 they began to build a system of fortifications and obstacles in order to cut off POLISARIO's support from across the border. Nevertheless, POLISARIO continued to attack Moroccan positions, and the conflict was a serious drain on the Moroccan budget. France was the main arms supplier to Morocco, selling Mirage jets, helicopters, armoured personnel carriers and other heavy equipment, worth billions of dollars. In the early 1980s, the US also stepped up its support for the Moroccan military.[4, pp. 28-29]

France, despite its military support and political commitment to Morocco adopted a formal neutrality on the issue of the Western Sahara conflict. It was important for France to hold this position, as the country wanted good relations with Algeria, and the French left had good relations with POLISARIO on its own. POLISARIO was even allowed to open an office in Paris in 1982. However, the French government has shown no sign of willingness to recognise SADR.[4, pp. 34-35] This was not an easy position for France, as both Morocco and Algeria wanted French support on the Western Saharan issue, and there have been diplomatic problems between Algeria and France. Right at the outset of the conflict, President Boumediene publicly criticized France for supporting Morocco, accusing the French of allying themselves with the country. Later, the relations became somewhat better, during the Mitterand years. One can argue that for France the most important thing was stability in Morocco, and as Western Sahara was an important factor in this domestic stability, the French would never use any form of pressure to force Morocco to accept some kind of solution to the conflict, while maintaining its neutral position on the Western Sahara conflict.[5]

Spain also had an ambiguous relationship with POLISARIO. As the former colonial power, it wanted to have good relations and made the opening of a POLISARIO office possible. Relations turned sour, however, when in 1985 POLISARIO forces shot at a Spanish fishing boat, killing two and after that there was an incident involving Spanish patrol boats.[6] The US and Saudi Arabia also began to increase their support for Morocco, and during the Reagan Administration M-60 tanks, reconnaissance aircraft and fighter jets were sold to the country, as well as the number of Moroccan officers studying in the US was increased.[6]

By 1987 the berm, which was built by the Moroccan armed forces was more than 1,200 miles long and it caused POLISARIO's freedom of movement to decrease significantly. During this time, POLISARIO also had to contend with the reduction of supplies from its backers, Libya and Algeria, who based upon different interest, saw the need to restrict their assistance. This in effect meant that the conflict became a stalemate, as militarily POLISARIO was unable to mount serious attacks on the Moroccan forces, while these

forces were unable to destroy POLISARIO militarily.[7] This situation needed a political solution, which was very hard to come by, without outside assistance.

### **THE ORGANISATION OF AFRICAN UNITY, THE UN AND PEACEKEEPING IN WESTERN SAHARA**

The Organisation of African Unity (OAU) undertook the first steps in order to create a settlement for the conflict. It wanted to create a neutral interim government, which in turn would prepare a referendum, in which the population could vote for either independence or integration with Morocco. The diplomatic track, however, became very difficult as POLISARIO undertook its own diplomatic steps. The lack of experience in regards with carrying out a plan of this magnitude as well as regional dynamics, like the Morocco-Algeria relations, were also important factors in the failure of the plan. The OAU itself became organisationally threatened as the accession of POLISARIO in the OAU caused a temporary boycott by those countries, which were supporting Morocco. In 1984 Morocco left the organisation as the SADR became a full member of it.[8, p.615] So the leadership of the OAU turned to the UN for help.

The UN has had a long history in African peacekeeping and it has had a decidedly mixed record. On the one hand, the UN has been engaged in numerous forms of peacekeeping missions in Africa from the light footprint observer missions to the larger efforts employing conventional army units. The first peacekeeping mission in the Congo had a negative outcome, and in the Cold War it didn't get an opportunity at new missions until the late 1980s. In 1988, however, 18 peacekeeping operations were established on the African continent, which was only possible due to the weakness of the Soviet Union. [9, pp. 2-3,14,17]

The Western Saharan situation perfectly fit into this new situation and the UN bodies went to work in order to end the conflict peacefully. As a first step, Resolution 40/50 of the UN General Assembly was adopted in December 1985. The resolution endorsed the essence of the previous OAU plan and the Secretary-General began talks, which ended in failure in May 1986.[8, pp.615-616] The renewed push came in 1986 from the Security Council (UNSC) with the adoption of UNSC Resolution 621, the first Special Representative of the UN Secretary-General was appointed for Western Sahara on 20 September 1988.[10]

On the diplomatic front, there was some optimism as Morocco and Algeria re-established diplomatic relations in 1988.[8, p.616] The efforts of the Secretary-General succeeded partly thanks to this rapprochement. A formal ceasefire was established and the UN plan for the settlement was accepted by the two parties on 30 August 1988.[9, pp. 240, 242] In June 1990, the UNSC adopted Resolution 658 that authorised the creation of a technical mission to Western Sahara and its neighbouring countries in order to obtain information and to create the necessary administrative aspects for the planned vote. The resolution also authorised the Secretary-General to transmit a report to the UNSC about the costs of the referendum and based on that the mission was planned to be established.[11] Accordingly, MINURSO was finally established by the UNSC Resolution Nr. 690. The resolution called for a referendum for self-determination, organised and supervised by the UN and created the MINURSO mission. [12] Later that year, in UNSC Resolution 725, the Security Council reiterated its previous positions.[13]

Things, however, were not easy, as both parties in the conflict considered the role of the UN a way for their own vision to win the conflict. It was not a solution based on mutual trust, but one, in which each side tried to gain the upper hand as the possibilities on the battlefield became harder to achieve.[9, p. 232] There were also technical questions, which proved to be irresolvable, like the question of who can participate in the planned vote.[9, pp. 241] The UN had no capacity to force a solution on the parties and thus began a tortured process of diplomacy, in which neither party in the conflict wanted to give anything away. The date of the planned referendum was pushed back to later dates again and again as the parties were unable to compromise on voter eligibility and other vital issues.

The voter registration process broke down in 1996 but it was revived and in 2000 MINURSO found more than 86,000 people eligible to vote (turning down the applications of most of the people who had Moroccan background). Thus the earlier consensus around the resolution of the conflict broke down in the year of 2000. Former US Secretary of State, James Baker played the leading role in the effort to reinvigorate the stalled process. He tried to arrange a negotiated compromise but the other parties opposed his solution. His peace plan of 2003 received a mixed welcome at first, and after it becoming clear that he wanted the UNSC resolution, Morocco opposed it openly. After the departure of Baker in 2004 the Moroccan side placed the emphasis on autonomy instead of self-determination. In turn, the nationalists opposing Moroccan presence turned to peaceful resistance. Baker's successor, Alvaro De Soto was unable to bring the parties to the negotiating table. [14]

The non-violent approach of POLISARIO held for a while but in October 2010 there was rioting as Moroccan authorities tried to dismantle a protest camp forcibly. The incident, however, was not well-covered in the international media as there was a media blackout in place in the Western Saharan region. It is unclear what happened and how many casualties there were. Only in Spain did the violent clashes evoke interest as the former colonial power still takes interest in the events of Western Sahara. There were no serious diplomatic repercussions but the European Parliament called for an international investigation into what had happened.[15] This incident also showed the difficulties of the MINURSO mission. As the report of the Secretary-General states: "*MINURSO was not able to monitor the situation in the camp because the Moroccan authorities impeded its access. Attempted military patrols and visits by United Nations security and police personnel were prevented or stopped on several occasions. (...) In response to continuing efforts by MINURSO, the Moroccan authorities eventually allowed one international security officer into the camp, on 4 November.*" [16] The incident showed clearly, that the current state of the conflict was still far from being resolved and the potential for a renewed violent conflict was still there. Since then, no information about an incident of similar size is available but the potential for a sudden escalation is still there.

As Norrie MacQueen points out UN peacekeeping missions need international backing and agreements also from outside of the theatre,[9, p. 2] so in the remainder of this chapter, we will take a close look at how the European Union views and contributes to the solution of the conflict in Western Sahara.

## THE DIPLOMATIC STAGE: EUROPEAN RELATIONS WITH MOROCCO AND POLISARIO

The Western Sahara conflict is present on multiple levels on the diplomatic stage. Beside the basic Morocco-POLISARIO level there is a regional level, where Morocco and its allies and POLISARIO and its allies play a role and there's the broad international stage, where the UN and international actors play a role. It is vital to get a grip on each of these levels in order to create a comprehensive picture on the nature of the international political engagement and how the EU fits into the picture.

The diplomatic background cannot be comprehended without understanding the relations between Morocco and Algeria, the latter being the most important supporter of POLISARIO. Although relations were good between the two countries during the war for independence, relations soured after the war, due to the differing natures of the regimes, which were created. Morocco with its more conservative system and Algeria with its more socialistic system approached the world in two very different ways and this caused the relationship to strain between the two. Also, the relationship was made more difficult by border disputes and accusations (and counteraccusations) of harbouring insurgents and subversive elements from the other country. In the 1980s, relations improved to some extent as the Algerian foreign policy became less ideological and focused more on regional issues. A high watermark in this process was the signing of the agreement in 1989, which established the Union of the Arab Maghreb (Union de Maghreb Arabe, UMA) with the participation of Morocco, Algeria, Libya, Mauritania and Tunisia and aimed to create a regional cooperation framework.[17, pp. 223-224]

Algeria was very active in its support for decolonisation and thus it inevitably ran into confrontations with Western powers. This meant, for example, that after the six-day war Algeria broke its diplomatic ties with the US. At later stages, the interests of the two countries became closer but this never meant a really close relationship between the two. The civil war in Algeria also made relations more difficult in the 1990s. Algeria has maintained close relations with France but this relationship also had its ups and downs as some voices demanded greater political distance from France. Despite these calls, economic and political relationship between the two countries remained good during the Cold War years and later as well.[17, pp. 228-232]

In contrast, Morocco had a special place in the Western foreign policy. Morocco had very good relations with the US and France, supported Western peace initiatives in the Middle Eastern peace process and had very active intelligence collaboration with Western powers. During the years of the Cold War, Morocco was considered to be an important ally against the spread of Soviet influence. As Pazzanita points out Morocco also has mastered the art of lobbying in the US. This meant that Morocco had a very strong ally in the US during and after the Cold War.[18]

There was much concern for internal stability in the early 2000s. After the terrorist attacks in 2003, France had a leading role in opposing the imposition of the Baker plan on Morocco. It was deemed to be a problematic time for the Moroccan government in domestic as well as in the international arena as Morocco was one of the few Arab countries supporting Western counterterrorism efforts and foreign policy agendas. [14, p. 258 ]

The French also played an important role after the departure of Baker in order to keep the mandate of MINURSO alive, despite the fact that Morocco refused to consider the

referendum, on which the mandate was based. The presence of MINURSO was seen as a way to keep a lid on the conflict by the French. Jacques Chirac, the President of France at the time, expressed his personal support to King Mohammed. [14, pp. 259-260]

The other important relationship Morocco has that influences European behaviour is its relationship with Spain. These relations are much more difficult compared to those with the French as the two countries had historical disputes on some issues, such as illegal migration, fishing rights etc. The low point in relations came in 2002 when Morocco took over a tiny island with the probable intent to test the Spanish response for the defence of its North African territories. The conflict ended with US mediation (EU support was hard to secure because of French opposition).[19, p. 657] However, with the Madrid bombings of 2004, the Spanish stance also changed as Morocco was an important partner in investigating the background of the attack. Spain, for a short while, tried to act as a mediator and proposed direct Algerian-Moroccan talks to resolve some of the outstanding issues. This was rejected by the Algerians and so the Spanish attempts ended in this regard.[14, p. 260] Pablo San Martín also points out that in the background of the Western Sahara conflict there has been quiet a competition between France and Spain in the 1990s and early 2000s. The successful peace efforts, that would have created an independent, Spain-friendly state would have been a diplomatic difficulty for Morocco and France (and probably for the US as well). The socialist government in Spain changed this course,[19, p. 657] but Spain remained a supporter of the UN backed peace process and Western Saharan independence nevertheless.

On the other hand, POLISARIO had also mounted an impressive diplomatic offensive in the 1970s and 1980s but it was a more regionally focused effort. In 1990 more than 70 states, mostly third world countries, established diplomatic relations with POLISARIO and its OAU membership was a further diplomatic victory against Morocco. In Europe and the US, POLISARIO had much more limited diplomatic efforts. Although much of Europe and the US did recognise the SADR in the 1980s, they didn't establish formal relations with POLISARIO.[18, pp. 270-273]

The most important backers of POLISARIO are Algeria and to some extent Spain. These two states were vital to pressure POLISARIO for example to adopt the Baker plan. But as it had already been mentioned, Spain tilted towards the positions of Morocco in the 2000s as the security situation after the Madrid Bombings of 2004 required to build a better relationship with Morocco. Nevertheless, the traditional sources of friction remained between the two countries, like the sovereignty over the two Spanish enclaves, illegal immigration, disputes over territorial waters etc.[19, pp. 654,656-657]

## **THE ROLE OF EU STRATEGIES AND INSTITUTIONS AND BILATERAL RELATIONS**

The position of the EU in regard to the conflict in Western Sahara has to be considered from different perspectives. Firstly, there is the interest of France, Spain, and other major EU countries in the region, which has an influence on the position they represent in the EU concerning this issue (these issues had already been covered). Likewise, member states with no or little interest of their own like to put forward generic issues like human rights or support the positions of interested members. Some don't form in depth policies of their own. This is astonishing, considering there are major strategic considerations regarding the security and prosperity of the EU. The common position often times reflects this

imbalance, but there are institutions in the EU, like the European Parliament, where disagreements about the Western Saharan conflict (among others) come to the forefront.

The EU has strategic interests in the peace and prosperity of the North African region as the stability of these countries is important for the security, economic vitality of its Southern members. Also, on issues like migration, crime and terrorism etc. the EU needs strong partners in the region. The Euro-Mediterranean Partnership and the European Neighbourhood Policy were conceived as vehicles for the creation of a more stable Middle East and North Africa. But these initiatives were primarily not focused on North African issues and also in other regions they proved to be very difficult if not impossible. In the early days, the Western Saharan conflict was considered to be an impediment to the stabilisation efforts in the region and put the conflict alongside conflicts like the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. But despite the rhetoric, no confidence building measures were put in place by the EU. [20, pp. 8-9]

Other than the interests of major European countries with interests in the region, there are also other issues, which need to be considered in relation to EU positions in regard to Western Sahara. For one, there's the question of international law and human rights issues.[20, p. 7 ] Other important members of the EU, like Germany, kept a low profile for a long time until joining MINURSO but then again, in a very minimalistic way, contributing only 4 personnel after 16 October 2013.[21]

As the member states have a wide range of opinion, this becomes clear on the floor of the European Parliament, which has become the most active institution in the EU regarding the issue of Western Sahara. The European Parliament has issued numerous resolutions, like the Resolution of 16 March 1995, when it called on Morocco to release prisoners detained during demonstrations for Western Saharan independence and respect the human rights statutes it has signed. [22] European Parliament MEPs have visited refugee camps in the region numerous times, like the meeting in 2001, when MEPs met Algerian and POLISARIO representatives and in 2002, when MEPs travelled to Morocco. During these visits, many issues were covered from both sides of the divide and included economic, social and political issues and the discussion included not only state and MINURSO officials but civil society representatives and NGO representatives as well. The final report on these trips noted that as the UN didn't seem to have an answer to the situation, the EU should be the facilitator of negotiations.[23] After the incidents of 2010, the European Parliament also passed resolutions regarding the conflict. It called "*on the EU to demand that the Kingdom of Morocco abide by international law regarding the exploitation of the natural resources of Western Sahara*" [24] and also called for an independent UN enquiry into what happened and criticized Moroccan authorities for their conduct against demonstrators and prisoners.[24]

The only uncontested and successful part of EU engagement is its role in the humanitarian support dimension. The EU's ECHO program has been engaged in the support of refugees living in camps in Algeria since 1993, providing food, water and health services among others. According to an EU report from 2004, more than 150,000 people were living in the camps, for which ECHO has provided its support.[25] According to an official publication, the EU has spent 9 million Euros in 2017 and planned to do the same for 2018.



This includes the supply of safe drinking water, medicine and health support, food and educational costs for refugees based in Algeria.[26] This means, of course, that the engagement has remained virtually unchanged since the early days of this humanitarian assistance.

Additionally, there's the issue of EU-Moroccan bilateral relations. The EU and Morocco signed an association agreement in 1996 (that come into force in 2000), as part of the Euro-Mediterranean Association Agreement and later a further agreement was signed as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy. Accordingly, Morocco has committed itself to the principles of human rights and democracy. Morocco was recognised with an advanced status as part of the European Neighbourhood Policy in 2008, which among others meant closer cooperation on the political, security and economic levels (economic relations go back to the 1970s). Morocco has become a leading trading partner of the EU.[28] As the following table shows, after 2008 the economic relations expanded significantly.

Year	Import (Mio €)	Export (Mio €)	Balance (Mio €)	Total value (Mio €)
2008	8,498	14,453	5,956	22,951
2009	6,585	12,038	5,453	18,622
2010	7,775	13,787	6,011	21,562
2011	8,876	15,407	6,531	24,283
2012	9,327	16,943	7,616	26,269
2013	10,046	17,287	7,242	27,333
2014	11,053	18,213	7,160	29,267
2015	12,456	18,142	5,686	30,599
2016	13,792	20,966	7,175	34,758
2017	15,117	22,366	7,249	37,484
2018	16,073	23,260	7,187	39,332

1. Table EU Trade flow and Balance with Morocco [28]

On the issue of security, Morocco has also become an important partner. Due to its geographical location, it has an important role in reducing the flow of illegal migration in the region. For example, Morocco was already chosen along with Afghanistan, Albania, Iraq, Somalia and Sri Lanka in 1999 by an EU High Level Working Group to receive funds in order to combat a complex set of problems, illegal migration among it (but the issue of human rights, democratisation etc. were also a priority).[29]

But the bilateral relations also had their own problems, also in part due to the conflict in Western Sahara. In 2016, the European Court of Justice decided, that the Western Sahara region, as it is not considered to be a part of Morocco, couldn't be covered by the agricultural agreement between the EU and Morocco. Also, according to a recent investigation by the newspaper EU Observer, Morocco has launched a public relations undertaking to bring the relations back on track.[30]

Regarding the official statements of the European Union, the EU has always supported the UN process. The conflict in Western Sahara is a reoccurring subject of the annual human rights report of the EU. In the 2014 edition, for example, the authors state that “EU has also consistently expressed support for the work of the UN” [46] and also declared that

through an agreement signed with Morocco in 2013, the EU aimed to strengthen human rights organisations.[31]

### THE TROOP CONTRIBUTIONS OF EU MEMBERS TO THE MINURSO MISSION

As the conflict in Western Sahara is almost on the doorstep of Europe, it is important to take a look at the role European nations play in the MINURSO mission. It is the official position of the EU that the conflict can only be resolved through the UN. However, it is interesting to take a detailed look at how many military observers, police and civilian officials the EU nations send into the conflict zone.

At first, it must be stated that the national composition of MINURSO is very wide-ranging. Countries from the wider region, like Djibouti, Ghana and Nigeria for example, were involved. Also major powers, like the US, the Russian Federation and China sent troops as part of MINURSO. And lastly, countries which have no serious regional interests, like South America, Southeast Asia etc. also contributed to the manpower requirements of MINURSO.

The table below shows the contribution of EU members and countries, which became members during the chosen period (the numbers contributed by nations during the period they were in accession talks are not counted in total EU contributions; it only serves as a reference for their later participation; those cells are marked with a grey background. Observes, police and other staff are not counted separately, the total contribution is marked in every entry.).

Country	Year										
	1995 [32]	1997 [33]	1999 [34]	2001 [35]	2003 [37]	2005 [37]	2007 [38]	2009 [39]	2011 [40]	2013 [41]	2015 [42]
Austria	4	6	5	3	2	2	2	2	2	2	3
Belgium	1	-	-	1	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Denmark	-	-	-	-	-	-	2	-	-	-	-
France	30	25	25	25	25	25	17	13	13	13	7
Germany	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	4
Greece	1	1	-	1	1	1	1	1	1	-	-
Ireland	9	8	8	3	4	4	3	3	3	3	3
Italy	6	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	5	-
Portugal	-	6	3	12	2	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sweden	-	-	-	1	1	-	-	-	-	-	-
Croatia	-	-	-	-	2	2	6	7	7	7	7
Hungary	-	2	-	7	7	7	7	7	7	7	7
Poland	2	3	3	6	1	1	1	1	1	1	1
Total EU	51	51	46	51	40	47	44	39	39	38	32
Total MINURSO	288	230	316	263	241	236	232	218	237	215	212

Country	Year										
	1995 [32]	1997 [33]	1999 [34]	2001 [35]	2003 [37]	2005 [37]	2007 [38]	2009 [39]	2011 [40]	2013 [41]	2015 [42]
Percent- age	17,7	22,2	14,6	19,4	16,6	19,9	19	18,9	16,5	17,7	15,1

2. Table EU Troop Contributions to the MINURSO Mission, 1995-2015

The table shows that the European commitment was never too high in the given timeframe. It was between 15-20 percent of total troop contributions and in all it showed a decreasing tendency from the second half of the 2000s. It is also worth noting that the smaller EU nations were more involved in contributing forces to MINURSO, like Croatia, Hungary and Ireland. From the major EU countries only France contributed larger numbers, which commitment showed decreasing tendencies over the years. The author has found no indication that there was a coordinated effort in this, however, there was no indication the EU nations wanted to increase their commitment in a coordinated fashion.

Of course, it is also worth mentioning that the mission wasn't without dangers and until today, there have been 16 fatalities in the history of MINURSO.[43] None of them were from EU contributing countries. (The nationalities of the fatalities were as follows: Australia: 1; Guinea: 1, Iraq: 1, Malaysia: 1, Morocco: 4, Norway: 1, Pakistan: 1, Philippines: 1, Switzerland: 2, Togo: 1, Tunisia: 1, US: 1) [44]

According to an estimate made in 2007 by the Crisis Group, the MINURSO mission cost 45 million USD a year, with additional funds spent on refugees by the UN. [46] So it is safe to say, aside from the human casualties, that the costs to the international community were more severe in the symbolic and political sense than on the financial level.

## CONCLUSION

As the chapter has shown there is a complex relationship between the European Union and Morocco, which casts its shadow over the EU's positions and roles regarding the conflict in Western Sahara. It would be strategically important for the EU that a resolution for the conflict was found, as this conflict, like some others in the Eastern regions, like East Ukraine, Nagorno-Karabakh etc. have the potential to disrupt regional dynamics and cause serious difficulties internationally. It is, however, a further complication that Morocco and Algeria are also strategic partners of the EU on a host of fronts and without the backing of some major members of the European Union, like France for example; it doesn't seem to be possible to place real pressure on the parties, even if the international diplomatic background was favourable. The situation is further complicated by the fact that Morocco is a vital partner for the EU on many issues from security to economic cooperation.

It is worth mentioning that the current outcome of the conflict between POLISARIO and Morocco is only possible, because the international community never exerted real pressure on conflicting parties, especially on Morocco, to find a realistic solution for the conflict. Also, the lack of international focus on the conflict coupled with serious foreign support (diplomatic as well as military, from France and the US especially) enabled Morocco, to use methods and military hardware which otherwise would not have been possible, making

its position much stronger compared to the possibilities of POLISARIO. Despite this massive support, the Moroccans were unable to decide the conflict in their own favour, so an international solution had to be searched for.

The EU didn't start a diplomatic initiative to help to end the conflict. This is partially caused by the EU's traditional problems of formulating and executing a common foreign policy. With some exception made by the European Parliament, no EU body tried to pressure Morocco into fulfilling its commitment for holding a referendum on the status of Western Sahara (although economic and security relations improved a lot during the 1990s and 2000s). This, on the one hand, shows the difficult nature of the conflict and the low chances for its peaceful resolution. On the other hand, the EU didn't live up to its ideals as it didn't try to organise a concerted diplomatic effort to support the UN when this could've helped. Although, its contribution to the MINURSO mission and on the humanitarian front is important, there is room for improvement.

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