

EU-Morocco relations after Granada: commitments strengthened by advanced status

The European Union-Morocco Summit in Granada is not just the first in our joint history, it is also the very first since the entry into force of the Treaty of Lisbon and the first ever organised with an Arab country. This bears unique testimony to the importance the EU attaches to its relations with the Kingdom of Morocco and caps a decade of unprecedented progress since the entry into force of the Association Agreement in March 2000. It also marks a new stage in our partnership and gives us the means to intensify and invigorate it.

The courageous process of reform which Morocco began some years ago has made it a privileged partner of the EU. On issues such as greater transparency of elections, improving the status and political representation of women, regionalisation, and major socio-economic reform in areas as varied as transport, housing, taxation, education and social protection, the EU has welcomed each step forward and tried hard to support Morocco in implementation.

By attaining advanced status in the European Neighbourhood Policy in October 2008, Morocco signalled its intention to move steadily closer to Europe and go beyond previous commitments. As the newly appointed European Commissioner for Enlargement and Neighbourhood Policy, I am pleased to see this process is fully under way, and I am convinced it will bring substantial practical benefits to the Moroccan people. This desire for greater political and economic *rapprochement* must be matched by steadfast efforts during the transition process. In the coming months, we will have to work more intensively to consolidate respect for fundamental freedoms, deepen democratisation, increase social justice, create jobs and build a modern economy which is integrated into the European Economic Area. The European Union is determined to provide stronger backing for these reforms and to remain Morocco's privileged partner. This is the unambiguous message the Commission has sent by substantially increasing its financial support to Morocco between 2011 and 2013. This makes the Kingdom easily the biggest beneficiary of European funds among the Union's neighbours.

One of the main tasks for the future is Morocco's gradual and phased convergence with the rules of the Community *acquis*. By bringing its standards and policies closer to those of the European Union, Morocco will lay firm foundations for its socio-economic reforms and increase its attractiveness. In the longer term, this will allow a higher degree of integration into the European economic and regulatory area and create new opportunities for investment, jobs, diversification and development. To achieve its ambitious aims, the Moroccan Government must now produce a clear strategy and ensure solid interministerial coordination. The Commission is ready to offer its full support in this endeavour.

Morocco cannot achieve its goal of greater integration into the European Economic Area without more progress in consolidating the rule of law. Europe was built and continues to develop thanks to the establishment of and respect for the rule of law, more than through

its market. We place a great deal of hope in the judicial reform recently launched by King Mohammed VI and in other initiatives which will consolidate respect for fundamental rights and freedoms.

Finally, I am pleased to see that our ties now extend way beyond the confines of official meetings between ministers and senior officials. The first EU-Morocco Business Summit, which took place in the margins of the Granada Summit and was attended by the Moroccan Prime Minister and the President of the European Commission, is the realisation of a wish expressed by Morocco during the discussions on advanced status. This is not the only example: the first meeting of the Forum of EU-Morocco Local Authorities was recently held in Cordoba and the inaugural meeting of the EU-Morocco Joint Parliamentary Committee should also be held soon. All of these events represent opportunities to develop the exchange and sharing of experience between the men and women who bring dynamism and change on both sides of the Strait.

The vision and the ambitious aims we talked about in Granada are within our reach. On the European Union side, we are ready to redouble our efforts to achieve them, and we will provide tireless support to the efforts of our Moroccan partner. If Morocco can rise to the challenge, we will be able to look back in a few years and proclaim that Granada was a real turning-point in EU-Morocco relations.