

## **EUROPEAN PARLIAMENT**

### **Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union**

*10th EU-Morocco Interparliamentary Meeting  
3rd EU-Mauritania Interparliamentary Meeting*

19-23 January 2004

Report by Gerardo Galeote Quecedo, chairman of the Delegation

#### **I. Introduction**

The working party visit to Morocco and Mauritania, originally planned for 2002, had had to be postponed until 2003 for time reasons. Difficulties with scheduling meant that the visit to Mauritania could not take place at that time and the visit was again postponed until January 2004. As it was necessary to stop over in Morocco en route to Mauritania, the working party decided it would be useful to take advantage of this opportunity to discuss with the Moroccan authorities the recently adopted family code, which had aroused a great deal of international interest.

The working party was headed by Gerardo Galeote Quecedo, chairman of the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union, and its members were Rosa Díez González, Yasmine Boudjenah, Florence Kuntz, Jean-Charles Marchiani, Vitaliano Gemelli, Demetrio Volcic, Michel J.M. Dary, Michel-Ange Scarbonchi and Salvador Garriga Polledo.

The discussions took place in a relaxed atmosphere and the choice of interlocutors met the delegation's expectations. In the light of the current situation, the visits were described as very important.

The release from prison of an opposition politician in Mauritania shortly before the interparliamentary meeting there was not considered to be a coincidence.

A press conference was held at the end of the visit to Mauritania and enjoyed considerable media interest.

## **II. Morocco (19 and 20 January 2004)**

1. Briefing with Sean Doyle, Head of the Commission Delegation in Morocco. Mr Doyle provided information about the three main current issues:
  - US-Moroccan negotiations  
The United States were putting pressure on Morocco to conclude a free trade agreement, which for them was a means of gaining access to the European and North African markets.  
For Morocco, this meant in practical terms that US agricultural products would flood the market, which could result in a deterioration of the social situation of rural Moroccans. Between two and three million people were employed in agriculture in Morocco, but were moving to towns and cities, which was aggravating the already difficult conditions in urban areas.  
Although the Moroccans were displaying optimism in terms of the textile sector, the United States were insisting on references to origin.
  - Association Agreement  
A better exchange of information between the partners would be advisable.
  - Illegal immigration  
An agreement between Spain and Morocco had been reached in Marbella in the last few weeks, the aim of which was to repatriate to their country of origin young Moroccans residing illegally in Spain. However, there was still the problem of young people of non-Moroccan origin who were arriving in Spain from sub-Saharan Africa via Morocco.
2. Meeting with Nouzha Skali, leader of the Socialist Alliance Group

Ms Skali described the new family code as revolutionary. After various attempted reforms, the new King had set up a working committee, which had included two women and which, after 30 months of proceedings, had produced a report. The chairman of this committee had been replaced by a politician and the King had had the final say on the remaining unresolved issues. In a speech to the nation, he had referred to the Koran. The legislation, which did not touch on religious matters, had been presented to the parliament and adopted unanimously the previous Friday. The issue of child custody in the event of divorce had been particularly difficult to settle. In future, there would need to be accompanying measures, such as setting up family courts and training judges, to ensure that the legislation was correctly applied.

Ms Skali stated that Moroccans living abroad often observed deeply-rooted traditions

and that an awareness campaign was necessary.

Asked about the wearing of headscarves, Ms Skali said they should be considered as a political and not a religious sign: they represented discrimination against women, who, by wearing the scarf, became subordinate to men and accepted all the rules that went with it, such as separate schools for men and women and a ban on girls attending swimming classes etc.

3. Meeting with Tayeb Fassi Fihri, Member with special responsibility for Foreign Affairs

Mr Fihri thanked the working party for the regular contact between the delegation and his ministry. He spoke only on the following subjects:

- Trade agreement with the United States  
Morocco hoped that this agreement would boost its economy. An agreement with the US did not impede the country's traditionally warm relations with Europe or the Arab and African states.
- The Western Sahara conflict  
The Moroccan Government was looking to a third way for the solution, somewhere between complete integration and full independence. This approach was certainly compatible with the concept of self-determination for the Saharawi people. It was important for the people of the area to be free and to be able to live according to basic democratic principles. To this end, the Government had embarked on a series of negotiations with the UN Special Envoy, James Baker.  
Just as important was the joint involvement of Morocco and Algeria in fighting terrorism, tackling underdevelopment and building democracy. A united Maghreb, which should also include Mauritania, would not be possible without first finding a solution to the Sahara conflict.  
Mr Fihri expressed a desire to see the EU fully involved in resolving the conflict. The EU provided a good example of how disputes could be settled in a peaceful fashion. The status quo could in no way be considered a solution, as a third of Morocco's territory was being called into question. The Government was taking a big risk if it agreed to Saharan autonomy. Morocco's latest proposal went much further than anything else currently on the table.
- Al-Qa'ida  
Members of this organisation were mobilising in southern Algeria, Mauritania and Niger and were a danger for those countries. Saharan independence would increase the threat, as it would be impossible to control the borders.
- Illegal immigration  
Morocco was negotiating a framework agreement with the EU for the repatriation of

illegal immigrants (according to information from the Commission, which, according to the case-law of the Court of Justice, is competent to conclude agreements of this kind).

A monitoring body needed to be set up. It would make no sense, however, without EU involvement.

#### 4. Meeting with Mustapha Sahel, Interior Minister

The discussion addressed the following issues:

- **Illegal immigration**  
Mr Sahel pointed out that Morocco had become an attractive destination for people not so well-off as the Moroccan people. Mafia-style organisations had been formed and needed to be dismantled. In an attempt to do so, the following measures had been adopted: the creation of a special authority, checks on land and sea by a 2500-strong squad and the creation of a special unit to combat mafia-style organisations. The EU had granted EUR 40m in aid, but it was not enough.
- **Reforms**  
The Interior Minister called on the EU to support the government reforms in the area of family law, which affected the Moroccan people and non-governmental organisations, to ensure that they met with acceptance.
- **Attack of 16 May 2003**  
Mr Sahel explained how the attack, which ran contrary to Islam, had affected the public. Anti-terrorism laws were being drafted and special attention was being paid, as in Europe, to ensure that the laws respected human rights and were not emergency laws. It was also necessary to combat terrorism by means of economic development and dialogue.
- **Rights of the press**  
The Interior Minister pointed out that nobody was planning to restrict press freedom. However, there was a professional code of ethics that journalists were required to observe. The King had recently granted an amnesty on humanitarian grounds to journalists who had recently been convicted by independent courts.

#### 5. Meeting with Mohamed Sajid, Mayor of Casablanca

Since September 2003, a coalition had been governing in Casablanca that included the PJD, a party with Islamist tendencies. Following the city's recent incorporation of several districts, it was facing major challenges in terms of public transport, waste disposal and treatment, and water and electricity supply.

### **III. Mauritania (20 to 23 January 2004)**

#### **1. Briefing**

During the briefing session, which was attended by the Head of the Commission Delegation and the ambassadors of Germany, representing the Council Presidency, France and Spain, economic and political matters were discussed.

Providing 61% of aid (according to 2002 data), the EU was the country's main donor. This money was being invested chiefly in infrastructure, such as the building of a road link between Mauritania's second city, Nouadhibou, and the capital, and also the environment. Lately, there had been an increase in the cost of living, which was explained by the pegging of the currency to the US dollar and the high percentage of imports from the EU.

The Government had placed its hopes in the oilfields discovered on the coast in 2002.

The delegation's visit was linked to the release of an opposition politician, Mr Mansour, who had been arrested two weeks ago on his return from Belgium. The presidential elections of November 2003 had taken place without incident, although the opposition had condemned irregularities which were difficult to identify. The opposition candidate, the former President Haidalla, had won 18% of the votes. Following the elections, he had been sentenced to five years in prison for carrying out an attempted coup, which had taken place during at Whitsun the previous year.

Around 130 people suspected of being involved in the coup were in jail. There were many human rights organisations in Mauritania, but the Government only recognised 13 of them.

#### **2. Meeting with the President of the National Assembly, the Vice-President of the Senate and other members of parliament**

Firstly, it was stressed that Mauritania had existed as a country since 1960 and had had a parliament since 1980, in which six parties were represented. There had been 17 constitutions in the last 20 years. In view of the country's lack of democratic experience, the EU's support was called for in particular.

Although the parliament had the right of legislative initiative, it had only exercised this right three times so far. There were three women in the National Assembly and four in the Council of Ministers. Turnout in elections varied from 60 to 65%.

Until around 20 years ago, 90% of the population had been nomads, but today they accounted for only 6% of Mauritians. There had previously been mobile polling stations, which had left the door wide open for election fraud. The EU had funded the introduction of identity cards, which had allowed the electoral roll to be

computerised.

Ninety per cent of children were in compulsory education. In terms of health care, there was one doctor for every 5000 inhabitants. The capital, Nouakchott, which had one million inhabitants, saw its population rise by 30 000 people each year.

Immigration was also a problem for Mauritania. Many of those who were heading for Morocco from the south ended up staying in Mauritania.

Since a moderate form of Islam was practised there, it was not a threat to the country. Nonetheless, in the run-up to the presidential elections there had been an excessive flow of money into the hands of religious leaders, who, in their sermons, were advocating the greater presence of Islam in daily life, something that had previously been unknown.

The view was reiterated that not only was it necessary to ensure that Mauritania remained under the remit of the EP Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union but that there should also be a place for it in the new Euro-Mediterranean Assembly.

### 3. Meeting with the Foreign Minister

The Foreign Minister began by giving an account of Mauritania's democratic development. Presidential elections had been taking place since 1986 and women had a firm place in society, an obvious example of which was the fact that one of the presidential candidates was female. There were many problems facing society, but there was a real will to strengthen democracy. Those casting doubt on the outcome of the presidential elections were members of extremist groups. There had been no political unrest in the last year, but the President had been the victim of an assassination attempt. Those behind the coup had fled to the desert, allegedly to Mali. However, Mali had had no involvement in the coup and relations with the country were important to Mauritania.

The Foreign Minister declined to comment on the Western Sahara issue, stating only that all the solutions were valid. On 31 January 2004, the Security Council would decide on how to proceed. This would be interesting, as Spain and Algeria currently had seats on the Security Council.

Dialogue on stability, security, economic integration and social affairs within the 5+5 forum played an essential role in preventing conflict between the partners.

The Foreign Minister envisaged being able to exploit the recently discovered oil reserves by the end of 2005, but no decision had been taken as yet on which company was to be given that responsibility.

### 4. Meeting with the Economics Minister

Mauritania was one of the first countries to draw up a plan to tackle poverty. The only way to do so effectively would be through economic reforms. Although progress had been made (94% of children received schooling and 100% of the population had been vaccinated against poliomyelitis), only one in two homes in the capital city of Nouakchott had running water.

Aid had been received mainly from the EU, but also from the World Bank and the African Development Bank.

The EU was Mauritania's chief trading partner. Eighty per cent of imports came from the Union and the Government hoped to receive revenue of somewhere near EUR 86m as a result of the fishing agreement it had concluded with the EU. However, the minister also voiced his wish to see more EU firms in the fishing industry investing in Mauritania.

On the subject of economic cooperation with the EU, he referred to a reduction in customs tariffs and the liberalisation of the exchange rate.

## 5. Meetings with party leaders

- a) Ch'Bih Ould Cheikh Malainine (from the Popular Front, who had spent two and a half years as a political prisoner)

He began by talking about the influence of 'Talibanism'. Although Mauritania was a small country, it was of great interest to Islamist extremists, previously unheard of in the country. Whoever exerted influence in Mauritania could extend it to the other African states. Wahabism, which until now had been unknown in that country, was now a considerable threat. This being the case, the leader regretted the fact that there was no mufti acting as a religious authority, who could advise the State, as had been the case in other Muslim countries.

Mr Ch'Bih Ould Cheikh Malainine was in favour of pluralism and democratic institutions, which were all the more necessary given that 75% of the population were younger than 30 and had an average life expectancy of 53 years.

Like the President, he criticised the Haidallah years, which had seen Sharia law introduced in the country. Mr Haidallah had won a small share of the votes (18%) in the November 2003 elections.

- b) Ahmed Ould Daddah (from the RFD, who had spent five years as a political prisoner)

The leader of the main opposition party was deeply critical of the present situation:

He accused the incumbent regime of being militaristic and dictatorial. He claimed that human rights were being abused on a daily basis. The two main opposition parties had been banned and corruption was prevalent at all levels. Those in power

had not used the aid they had received for the purposes for which it had originally been granted.

The programme drawn up by the Government to tackle poverty was ineffective, as the resources available were not being fairly distributed.

Mr Ould Daddah condemned the Commission's favourable opinion on the presidential elections of November 2003. He called for a greater commitment from the EU to help Mauritania out of this difficult situation.

He concluded by talking about the existence of slavery. It had been banned under several laws, but it still went on in reality.

c) Mohamed Ould Maouloud (leader of the UFP)

This party had supported the former President, Mohamed Khouna Ould Haidallah, with whom it had signed an agreement on democracy and the even distribution of natural resources, in the last presidential elections. However, their candidate claimed that the election results had been rigged. Mauritania's political classes did not believe in democracy and another coup, like the one of 1 June 2003, looked likely.

The UFP leader also called for a stronger EU commitment to help solve the crisis.

d) Boullah Ould Mogueya (Secretary-General of the PRDS, the governing party)

The Secretary-General of the PRDS began by outlining his party's objectives: opening up to other nations, justice, gender equality, the rule of law and democracy, modernising society and tackling illiteracy.

The Government's efforts were bearing fruit: democracy had taken root, institutions worthy of trust had been established and the economic situation had improved thanks to the creation of a transport infrastructure. Within the party, there were groups working on issues such as education and women's rights.

The dialogue with opposition parties was of particular importance. Nevertheless, distinctions needed to be made among the opposition ranks. Discussions were taking place with the legal opposition, for instance, on the introduction of identity cards and the funding of legal parties. However, the legal opposition had cut off dialogue before the elections.

There was also an extremist opposition, with which it was impossible to communicate, as it was only looking for confrontation. There was a leadership crisis among the opposition and its message was not reaching the people.

## 6. Meeting with the Interior Minister



The minister focused on the following issues:

- Development of democracy  
After the 1982 revolution, the first municipal elections had taken place in 1986, followed by parliamentary and presidential elections and the referendum on the Constitution in 1991. A total of 17 elections had taken place up to 2003. In this time, the electoral roll had been computerised, which had created greater transparency.
- Immigration  
For years there had been attempts to migrate to the north. In the meantime, an agreement had been drawn up with Spain, which the Interior Minister considered to be effective.
- Rural exodus  
In 1960, 1000 people had been living in Nouakchott; now there were a million inhabitants. In order to deal with this rural exodus, dams had been built to supply rural areas and schooling had been decentralised.

## 7. Meeting with the President

The President began by expressing his gratitude for EU aid to Mauritania, which had played a very important role in stabilising the country.

He went on to refer to the danger posed by Islamist extremists and the threat to religion. In May 2003, shortly before the attacks in Riyadh and Casablanca, the mosques had been packed with young men calling for holy war. They were frustrated Islamists, who had no future. In the Christian churches, on the other hand, there had never been any problems. The President condemned unreservedly the events of 11 September and described them as an attack against humanity. There was only one definition of democracy and it had to be independent of religion.

Unfortunately, the Koran was being interpreted at will, whereas the interpretations should be limited to the words of the prophet. This also applied to the position of women in Islam. Islam respected women, but men had interpreted the Koran wrongly, with disastrous consequences for women living in a Muslim society. Women found themselves in a position of inequality, also manifested in the compulsory wearing of the headscarf.

The President stated that there needed to be a greater number of female candidates in the next elections. As long as women were deprived of their rightful place in society, there could be no future for society as a whole.

On the subject of the role of the United States in the region, he wished to see the Bush Government more open to consulting the entire region.

Finally, he stressed that the delegation's visit had been very important and he hoped that there would be more meetings of this nature in the future.

#### **IV. Conclusion**

The working group visit to Mauritania has made clear the importance of contact with the country at parliamentary level. Although Mauritania still has a long way to go on the road to democracy, as it is understood in the west, there are signs that democratic changes are taking place, which must continue to be encouraged through bilateral relations. This is all the more necessary given that the country is in a transition period, with the threat of Islamist forces disrupting Mauritania's progress towards democracy.

**PARLEMENT EUROPEEN  
DELEGATION POUR LES RELATIONS AVEC LES PAYS DU MAGHREB  
ET L'UNION DU MAGHREB ARABE**

**Nouakchott 20-23 janvier 2004**

**PROGRAMME**

**Mardi 20 janvier 2004**

- |         |  |
|---------|--|
| 15 h 20 | Arrivée à Nouakchott par vol Air France  |
| 21 h 55 | Arrivée à Nouakchott par vol Royal Air Maroc<br>Accueil par Mme. Dominique Pavard, Chef de Délégation de la<br>Commission Européenne, par la Délégation mauritanienne ainsi<br>que par<br><br>SEM Bernd Morast, Ambassadeur d'Allemagne, SEM Patrick<br>Nicoloso, Ambassadeur de France et SEM Enrique Ruiz Molero,<br>Ambassadeur d'Espagne |
| 22 h 30 | Installation à l'Hôtel Novotel   |

**Mercredi 21 janvier 2004**

- |                   |   |
|-------------------|---|
| 08 h 45 – 09 h 45 | Présentation du programme de la visite et des relations UE-<br>République Islamique de Mauritanie par Mme. Dominique Pavard,<br>Chef de Délégation de la Commission Européenne et par les<br>Ambassadeurs des Etats membres (Allemagne, Espagne, France)<br><i>(Salle de conférence du Novotel)</i> |
| 10 h 00           | Audience avec M. Rachid Ould Saleh<br>Président de l'Assemblée Nationale ( <i>à l'Assemblée Nationale</i> ) +<br>Amb. Allemagne   |
| 10 h 30 – 11 h 45 | Séance de travail à l'Assemblée Nationale avec la délégation<br>d'accompagnement mauritanienne  |
| 12 h 00           | Audience avec M. Saleck Ould Abdel Jelil<br>Vice-Président du Sénat   |
| 12 h 30           | Audience conjointe avec<br>SEM. Mohamed Vall Ould Bellal, Ministre des Affaires Etrangères  |
| CR\531858ES.doc   | 11/16 PE 341.263  |

Traducción externa

SEM. Abdel Kader Ould Mohamed, Secrétaire d'Etat de l'UMA  
(au Palais des Congrès)

- 14 h 00 Déjeuner (à la résidence du Chef de Délégation)
- 15 h 00 Audience avec M. Abdallahi O. Souleymane O. Cheikh Sidia  
Ministre des Affaires Economiques et du Développement
- 16 h 00 Rencontre avec M. Ch'Bih Ould Cheikh Mélaïnine  
Président du Parti Front Populaire
- 17 h 00 Rencontre avec M. Ahmed Ould Daddah  
Président du Parti RFD
- 18 h 00 Rencontre avec M. Mohamed Ould Maouloud  
Président du Parti UFP
- 20 h 00 Dîner offert par le Président de l'Assemblée Nationale à l'Hôtel  
Mercure

**Jeudi 22 janvier 2004**

- 08h30 – 10h00 Rencontres à l'Hôtel Novotel
- 10 h 15 Rencontre avec M. Boullah Ould Mogueya  
Secrétaire Général du PRDS
- 11 h 00 Audience avec M. Kaba Ould Elewa  
Ministre de l'Intérieur
- 12 h 00 Audience avec le Président de la République
- 13 h 30 Point presse au Novotel
- 14 h 30 Déjeuner libre au NOVOTEL
- 15h00 – 16h45 Contacts bilatéraux ou visite de la ville

- 19 h 00                    Rencontre avec la délégation mauritanienne à l'Assemblée Nationale
- 19 h 30                    Rencontre et débriefing avec les Ambassadeurs des Etats-membres présents en Mauritanie (Allemagne – France – Espagne) à la résidence de l'Ambassadeur d'Allemagne (pays assurant la Présidence ce 1<sup>er</sup> semestre 2004)
- 20 h 30  
Délégation                Cocktail-dînatoire offert à la résidence de Mme. Pavard, Chef de de la Commission Européenne
- 23 h 00                    Départ pour l'aéroport
- 23 h 55                    Départ de parlementaires par le Vol Air France AF 765

**Vendredi 23 janvier 2004**

- 07 H 10                    Départ de parlementaires par le Vol Royal Air Maroc AT 512

**Samedi 24 janvier 2004**

- 23 h 55                    Départ de parlementaires par le Vol Air France AF 765

# PARLEMENT EUROPEEN

DELEGATION POUR LES RELATIONS AVEC LES PAYS DU MAGHREB  
ET  
L'UNION DU MAGHREB ARABE

## 10ème rencontre interparlementaire PE-Maroc 3ème rencontre interparlementaire PE-Mauritanie

Rabat 19-20 janvier 2004  
Nouakchott 20-23 janvier 2004

Liste des participants

### MEMBRES DU PARLEMENT EUROPÉEN

<u>Membres</u>	<u>Groupe</u>	<u>Pays</u>	<u>Commission</u>
M Gerardo GALEOTE QUECEDO <i>Président</i>	PPE-DE	Espagne	Commission des affaires étrangères, des droits de l'homme, de la sécurité commune et de la politique de défense
Mme Yasmine BOUDJENAH*	GUE/NG L	France	Commission du développement et de la coopération
Mr Michel DARY*	GUE/NG L	France	Commission juridique et du marché intérieur
Mme Rosa DIEZ GONZALEZ	PSE	Espagne	Commission des affaires étrangères, des droits de l'homme, de la sécurité commune et de la politique de défense
M Salvador GARRIGA POLLEDO	PPE-DE	Espagne	Commission des Budgets
M Vitaliano GEMELLI*	PPE-DE	Italie	Commission du développement et de la coopération
Mme Florence KUNTZ	EDD	France	Commission de la culture, de la jeunesse, de l'éducation, des médias et des sports

M Jean-Charles MARCHIANI	UEN	France	Commission des affaires étrangères, des droits de l'homme, de la sécurité commune et de la politique de défense
M. Michel-Ange SCARBONCHI	GUE/NG L	France	Commission du développement et de la coopération
M. Demetrio VOLCIC	PSE	Italie	Commission des affaires étrangères, des droits de l'homme, de la sécurité commune et de la politique de défense

\* uniquement le Mauritanie

Abbreviations:

PPE-DE: Groupe du Parti Populaire Européen (Démocrates-Chrétiens) et Démocrates Européens

PSE: Groupe du Parti des Socialistes européens

Verts/ALE: Groupe des Verts/Alliance Libre européenne

GUE/NGL: Groupe confédéral de la Gauche unitaire européenne/Gauche verte nordique

UEN : Groupe Union pour l'Europe des Nations

EDD : Groupe pour l'Europe des démocraties et des différences

Secrétariat, Délégations Interparlementaires

M	Hans-Hermann	<b>KRAUS</b>	Administrateur Principal
Mme	Morag	<b>DONALDSON</b>	Assistante administrative

Interprètes

Mme	Dominique	<b>DE GEOFFROY</b>
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Conseillers groupes politiques

Mme	Beatrice	<b>SCARASCIA</b>	Conseillère, groupe PPE-DE
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Mr Francisco  
Mme Sonia

**GUERRA**  
**CROZIER**

Conseiller, groupe PSE  
Conseillère, groupe EDD