



PACE project in the framework of the Action Plan for Morocco (2018-2021)
“Strengthening of democratic reforms in Morocco: key role of Parliament”,
financed by the Voluntary Contribution of Norway

RATIONALE

In 2011, in order to support democratic reforms in the southern Mediterranean region, the Council of Europe developed a new policy towards neighbouring regions and strengthened its long-standing ties, in particular with Morocco. In April 2012, the Secretary General of the Council of Europe and the Moroccan Minister of Foreign Affairs have agreed on first [Neighbourhood Co-operation Priorities for Morocco 2012-2014](#), followed by the [Neighbourhood Partnership 2015-2017](#) adopted by the Council of Europe Committee of Ministers on 4 February 2015, thus formalizing the strengthening of cooperation. In view of the encouraging results of this cooperation and in order to consolidate political dialogue and technical cooperation with Morocco, the Action Plan for Morocco is currently continuing within the framework of the [Neighbourhood Partnership 2018-2021](#) adopted by the Committee of Ministers of the Council of Europe on 21 March 2018.

The priorities for action for Morocco, which, after the adoption of a new Constitution in 2011, began a long period of democratic reforms, have been jointly defined and concern areas of the Council of Europe's priorities: democracy and the rule of law, human rights and the fight against discrimination, in which the Council of Europe has expertise. Morocco was also able to accede to several Council of Europe conventions and partial agreements, open to non-member states. Voluntary contributions from Council of Europe member States constitute additional major sources of funding for co-operation activities with neighbouring countries, such as a voluntary contribution from Norway to the Action Plan for Morocco (2018-2021). The [Council of Europe Office in Rabat](#), in place since 2014, plays a crucial role in the co-ordination and implementation of field activities.

Since 2012, in addition to bilateral cooperation, Morocco regularly participates in regional activities organized in the framework of the South Program [I](#), [II](#) and [III](#), alongside other countries in the Southern Mediterranean (Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia) and the Near and Middle East (Jordan, Lebanon, Palestine) aimed at promoting North-South and South-South cooperation on many topics of common interest. This joint programme is funded by the European Union and the Council of Europe and implemented by the Council of Europe.

The Parliamentary Assembly (PACE) has strengthened its relations with the national parliaments of neighbouring countries through a new status of Partner for Democracy to the PACE (Resolution 1680 (2009) <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=17764&lang=en>). The Parliament of Morocco was the first to benefit from this status since 2011 (Resolution 1818 (2011) <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=18002&lang=en>), followed by the Palestinian National Council and the Parliament of Jordan. This status awarded to partner Parliaments, which wish “to embrace the values of the Council of Europe, which are pluralist and gender parity-based democracy, the rule of law and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms” gives them certain rights and obligations. Partners for Democracy may constitute a national delegation to the PACE, renewable each year

(Morocco has a parliamentary delegation of 6 deputies and 6 substitutes), and a permanent secretariat to the PACE, permitting them to actively participate in the work of the PACE (ordinary sessions, meetings of its committees, cooperation projects), however without having the right to vote. But it also asks them to take a number of commitments and to regularly inform the Assembly on the state of progress in implementing Council of Europe principles. Each Partner for Democracy country is therefore monitored. A periodic assessment report is drawn up by a PACE rapporteur indicating progress in the fields of the rule of law, human rights and non-discrimination and the points needing improvement. The last report concerning Morocco dates from 2019 (Resolution 2282 (2019): <http://assembly.coe.int/nw/xml/XRef/X2H-Xref-ViewPDF.asp?FileID=27712&lang=en>).

PACE PROJECT

The Assembly has cooperated with the Parliament of Morocco for many years. Since 2012, this cooperation has been strengthened in the framework of the Partnership for Democracy to the PACE, financed by the PACE cooperation programmes, the South Programme I, II and III (<https://assembly.coe.int/LifeRay/APCE/pdf/PPSD/PPSD-SOUTH-PROG-EN.pdf>), joint programme with EU, and currently as part of the Action Plan for Morocco (2018-2021), financed by the voluntary contribution of Norway.

The main objective of this one-year PACE project (October 2019 - September 2020) of the cooperation between the PACE and the Parliament of Morocco is to continue to support the Moroccan Parliament in the implementation of its legislative reforms leading to the strengthening of the parliamentary democratic system in Morocco and to the construction of an egalitarian society respecting democracy and human rights.

In the framework of this project parliamentarians and staff members of the Parliament of Morocco are better informed about priorities and values of the Council of Europe and their awareness is raised as to their role in implementing Council of Europe standards in national legislation and practice of parliamentary work in the context of their country.

PACE activities are organised by the Parliamentary Project Support Division in co-operation with relevant PACE Committees and divisions as well as different Council of Europe bodies and directorates sharing their experience and good practice with Moroccan partner.

IMPLEMENTATION AND ACHIEVEMENTS

The activities of the present project responded to the specific needs of the Parliament of Morocco, expressed by their representatives during a series of preparatory meetings, from March to September 2019. However, as the allocated budget for one year of activities was very limited, we could plan only one activity on parliamentary level and two seminars for the staff.

On 4 and 5 November 2019 in Strasbourg, an *Information Seminar on the Council of Europe for the staff members of the Parliament of Morocco* was organised for 12 staff members of the Chamber of Representatives of the Parliament of Morocco and **on 19 and 20 February 2020 in Strasbourg**, an *Information Seminar on the Council of Europe for staff members of the Parliaments of Morocco and Jordan* was organised for 12 staff members of the Chamber of Councillors of the Parliament of Morocco and 12 staff members of the Parliament of Jordan (participation of Jordan delegation was financed by the South Programme III).

Those two, two-day seminars were divided into three working sessions.

The introductory session presented to participants the mandate, structure and functioning of the Council of Europe, its place on the European and international scenes as well as its relations

with non-member States and programmes of co-operation with the Southern Mediterranean Region and with Morocco in particular.

The second session was devoted to the role and work of the Parliamentary Assembly as well as its relations with national parliaments of non-member States. The staff members could also learn about some practical aspects of its work, such as management of PACE ordinary parliamentary sessions or communication policy of the PACE on internal and external levels – a point of great interest for Moroccan Parliament, which would like to develop its communication policy and to organise communication campaigns to promote parliamentary democracy among Moroccan citizens.

The aim of the third session was to present some aspects of the Council of Europe activities in the three domains of its priorities: fight against the threats to the Rule of Law and to Democracy and fight for the equality and non-discrimination. In this part the online training programme on human rights for professional lawyers 'HELP' was also presented to participants.

Throughout those activities, participants could freely ask questions to the speakers and exchange their experiences.

Our Regional Parliamentary Conference on the Ten Years of the Partnership for Democracy: Achievements and Challenges, planned for 11 June 2020, had to be postponed due to the COVID-19 crisis.

We hope to be able to continue the cooperation with the Parliament of Morocco, in order to respond to all its needs for the Assembly's support in a new framework of a future cooperation project.