



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

**Sixth Interparliamentary meeting between
the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries
and the Delegation from the Mauritanian Parliament**

15-18 February 2010

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Introduction

The sixth interparliamentary meeting between the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union and the delegation from the Mauritanian Parliament was held in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou from 15-18 February 2010. The last meeting between the European Parliament and the Mauritanian Parliament took place in Strasbourg on 24-25 October 2007.

The mission by members of the European Parliament (EP) took place in the delicate context of the resumption of cooperation and development assistance, suspended following the military coup on 6 August 2008 in accordance with Article 96 of the Partnership agreement between the members of the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States and the European Community and its Member States¹ (the Cotonou Agreement).

During a preparatory meeting held on 10 February 2010 in Strasbourg², members taking part in the EP delegation to Mauritania agreed on the objectives of their mission, namely:

- ✓ to resume contact with their Mauritanian counterparts;
- ✓ to assess the implementation of the inclusive national dialogue;
- ✓ to assess the general stability of the country.

The EP delegation also wanted to address topics of mutual interest, such as migration and the fisheries agreement. Finally, since several European hostages³ had been abducted in Mauritania and were still being held by the Al-Qaeda Organisation in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) at the time of the mission, the delegation raised their case during meetings with members of the government. Similarly, the situation of Hanefi Ould Dehah, editor of the online newspaper *Taqadoumy*, was also raised during meetings with members of the government and with the President⁴. Mr Hanefi had in fact been sentenced to a two-year prison term on Thursday 4 February 2010 by the Court of Appeal for ‘offending public decency, inciting revolt and criminal publication’.

Apart from the meetings with the National Assembly and the Senate, members of the delegation also met with members from the majority and opposition, NGOs in Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, and members of the government (see annex for final programme).

I – A difficult return to constitutional rule

Coup d'état: a brief reminder

On 5 August 2008, a group of 25 MPs and 23 members of the Senate announced their mass resignation from the presidential majority. This resignation, orchestrated with the military, led

¹ Signed in Cotonou on 23 June 2000, OJ L 317, 15.12.2000, p. 3.

² See minutes (PE804913).

³ On 29 November 2009, AQIM kidnapped three Spanish aid workers, and an Italian couple three weeks later.

⁴ Mr Hanefi was released on 26 February 2010 along with some 100 ordinary prisoners following a pardon by the Mauritanian President.

to the arrest on 6 August of Mauritania's President and Prime Minister by generals involved in the coup. The leader of the operation was the head of the presidential guard, Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, whom President Abdallahi had dismissed the day before together with two other generals. Ignoring this dismissal, General Abdel Aziz installed himself at the head of a 'High State Council', which removed President Abdallahi from office and announced that new presidential elections would take place. All other institutions, including the Parliament, remained in place.

The junta has the support of the vast majority of mayors (191 out of 216) and MPs (106 out of 151). General Abdel Aziz issued a decree stating that Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf, Mauritania's former ambassador to the EU and Belgium, would head a transitional government.

Officially, the ACP Group, the African Union and the European Union (EU) condemned the coup. Again, the EU opened talks under Article 96 of the Cotonou Agreement and suspended cooperation outside existing agreements, humanitarian aid and direct aid for the population.⁵

On 4 September 2008, the EP adopted a resolution condemning the military coup⁶, in which the Parliament called on the European Commission to engage in a political dialogue, pursuant to Article 8 of the Cotonou Agreement and, if this did not succeed, to freeze aid as stipulated in Article 96 of the Agreement.

By Council Decision of 6 April 2009 concerning the conclusion of consultations with the Islamic Republic of Mauritania under Article 96 of the ACP-EC Partnership Agreement⁷, the EU outlined a road map allowing the gradual resumption of cooperation based on the signing and implementation of a consensual solution for ending the crisis, including free, transparent and representative presidential elections organised by credible institutions.

Dakar Agreement: a consensual solution for ending the crisis

The signing of the Dakar Agreement on 4 June 2009 between the various Mauritanian political forces involved in the conflict has allowed a consensual solution for ending the crisis and a return to constitutional rule. Cooperation has partly resumed. Full cooperation required the implementation of most of the steps laid down by the Dakar Agreement and the holding of presidential elections, which finally took place on 18 July 2009.

Unsurprisingly, the presidential election saw the victory of the coup leader, General Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz, elected with 52% of the vote. He avoided a second round by just 17 000 votes. The President of the Independent National Electoral Commission, Mr Dey, resigned over 'doubts (...) as to the fundamental reliability of these elections'. Three opposition candidates and leading political figures criticised the widespread fraud and lodged an appeal with the Constitutional Court. They were: Ahmed Ould Daddah, leader of the main opposition party, Messaoud Ould Boulkheir, Speaker of the National Assembly and the candidate for the anti-coup movement, and Colonel Ely Ould Mohamed Vall, former head of

⁵ See note by Stefan Krauss, DG EXPO – Policy Department, January 2010, PE 432 161.

⁶ European Parliament resolution of 4 September 2008 on the coup in Mauritania – P6_TA (2008)0411.

⁷ Council Decision 2009/472/EC, OJ L 156, 19.6.2009.

the junta (2005-2007). It took the Court just 48 hours to uphold the victory of Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz.

The EU declared that ‘allegations of electoral fraud should be properly investigated and decided upon by the competent Mauritanian institutions in accordance with national and international law standards.’

In accordance with the Council Decision of 6 April 2009, a joint monitoring mission by the EU Presidency and the Commission went to Mauritania from 5 to 7 October 2009 in order to assess the possibility of a full resumption of cooperation (10th EDF).

The findings of the mission tallied with the opinion of the international community and Mauritania was considered to have made a complete return to constitutional order, thereby allowing the full resumption of cooperation as provided for by the decision of 6 April 2009. However, in accordance with the recommendations of the International Contact Group on Mauritania, there was a need for follow up on the chapter of the Dakar Agreement concerning an inclusive national dialogue after the presidential elections.

This dialogue is aimed at strengthening the country’s stability while some of the issues that were root causes of the coup of 6 August 2008 have still not been addressed, in particular the rebalancing of power, the institutional reforms, the role of the armed forces and the strengthening of democracy and good governance in general.

International cooperation: gradual resumption

In terms of development projects, the EU (Member States and Commission) is the country’s second largest donor after the World Bank. Of the Member States, France, Germany and Spain fund major development programmes in the country.

Under the 9th EDF, EU aid concentrated on transport (82%), capacity building (12%), and one non-focal sector (6%). To support the democratic transition in 2005, it was redirected towards institutional support projects.

Support under the 10th FED (2008-2013) amounts to EUR 156 million. The first focal sector, governance (EUR 47 million), provides support for decentralisation, state modernisation and stronger citizen involvement, which are necessary to establish sound governance and to improve the effectiveness of the fight against poverty. The second focal sector – regional integration and transport (EUR 56 million) – includes contributions both to improving road infrastructure and to continuing the road transport reform started under the 8th and 9th EDF.

General budget support of EUR 40 million for the fight against poverty is also planned, and there is a EUR 2.6 million contingency budget.

Investment in good governance, an ambition expressed by the Mauritanian authorities and in need of support, is designed to clean up public finances, increase the efficiency of the state, bring the administration closer to the people and increase participation.

Transport aid is justified by the contribution to the achievement of the objectives of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers (PRSPs) (contributing to growth, improving access, reducing poverty and achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by facilitating public access to basic social services).

It should be noted that a one-year suspension of cooperation has serious repercussions on 'community' cooperation, both for administrative and procedural reasons, and owing to the need to realign programmes and projects with broad-based and targeted strategies of the new government, which are still poorly defined. Cooperation is currently funded by the 9th and 10th EDF, since only two years of normal implementation (2006-07) were able to take place⁸.

Although the small number of cooperation actors facilitates the coordination of initiatives, the various stakeholders have underlined the need for the government to introduce a coordination mechanism for all development aid over the medium and long term. This proposal was echoed in the conclusions of the sixth interparliamentary meeting.

The Mauritanian Parliament: limited role and resources

Mauritania has a bicameral system with a National Assembly of 95 members, elected for a four-year term, and a Senate of 56 members elected for six years by indirect suffrage.

Following the adoption of the Constitution in 1991, the Parliament initially saw its role reduced to that of a rubber-stamp organisation. The transition which began in 2005 signalled a turning point and the current Parliament, elected in 2006, has shown enormous dynamism. In addition, almost 18% of its members are women, elected under a law passed during the transitional period which requires 20% of the Assembly to be made up of female MPs.

However, the Parliament suffers from failings linked to practices and rules that are unsuited to the Mauritanian context. As in other countries in the Maghreb, the influence of the French model has resulted in a drastic limitation of the powers of the Parliament in favour of the executive in the name of parliamentary rationalisation. Furthermore, Parliament also suffers from a significant lack of material resources (infrastructure⁹, computers¹⁰, budget), qualified personnel (MPs and staff, absence of parliamentary assistants) and organisational coherence. These two factors combined make it difficult to foster a parliamentary culture.

The Speaker of the National Assembly, Mr Boulkheir, has also noted that: 'Parliament has a glaring lack of resources and little experience of democracy.'¹¹ The Parliament seems to have no real lawmaking powers and is hampered by rubber-stamp politics.

⁸ Interview with cooperation agencies on 18 February 2010.

⁹ The Assembly only has 17 offices for its entire administrative personnel and a few individual or shared offices for MPs. Committees cannot therefore be in session at the same time.

¹⁰ The National Assembly's administration only has four computers and two photocopiers. The Parliament currently has no documentation and archiving service.

¹¹ Interview with Ould Boulkheir on 15 February 2010.

The problems identified can be grouped into three categories:

- 1) lack of material resources,
- 2) issues linked to skills and organisation,
- 3) issues linked to current practices and rules.

Within the administration, there is a glaring discrepancy between an excess of under-qualified staff and a shortage of administrators with the necessary expertise. The Parliament has some 400 staff in total, 120 of them administrative officers, around 80 of whom work for the National Assembly and around 30 of whom work for the Senate. Fewer than half have graduated from higher education. The Senate has 12 administrators, while the National Assembly has 20¹².

The wide range of tasks that MPs must perform without the help of assistants undermines their primary role, which is representation or governance.

As for the proximity between MPs and citizens, voters often express a lack of confidence in their representatives. This is due to a lack of media coverage of parliamentary activities, in turn limited by its short sessions (two 45-day sessions a year). Added to this is the lack of organisation and presence of MPs in their constituencies between sessions.

In 2009, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) launched a support programme for the Mauritanian Parliament (USD 750 000 over four years) aimed at contributing to the implementation of the Parliamentary Development Strategy recently adopted by the Mauritanian Parliament. To that end, there are plans to support both Houses of Parliament in order to allow the institution to fulfil its role as a vital cog in the democratic system. The EU would undoubtedly gain from developing or supporting similar initiatives to strengthen parliamentary democracy in the context of governance programmes.

II – State of the inclusive national dialogue

Evaluation of the inclusive national dialogue

According to President Abdel Aziz, ‘dialogue has led to the current situation in Mauritania’ – in other words, a form of political nomadism that penalises democracy – and ‘Mauritania is a country with a young and emerging democracy and each component must play its part constructively.’¹³ However, the President has received numerous demands from the opposition to join the presidential majority. For the President, political dialogue has to take place within the Parliament.

The majority has repeatedly underlined that the opposition needs to publicly recognise the results of the presidential elections and that political dialogue must take place between the political forces and not just with the President of the Republic. This dialogue must be properly planned, ‘real opposition being an opposition that prepares for a change of power’¹⁴.

¹² Source: United Nations Development Programme (UNDP).

¹³ Interview with President Abdel Aziz on 17 February 2010.

¹⁴ Interview with Prime Minister Ould Laghdaf on 17 February 2010.

The opposition has said that it was surprised by the attitude of the international community, which had called for elections to be held within a short timeframe (three weeks), which was not enough time for it to organise its campaign. Short on resources and with no access to the media, the opposition nonetheless demonstrated its support for a national political dialogue¹⁵. The need for a ‘genuinely inclusive dialogue organised in accordance with the Dakar Agreement between the various parties to that agreement has become essential to preserve the country, which is already in the grip of chronic instability’¹⁶.

The delegation noted that it was virtually impossible at present to hold this inclusive national dialogue, mainly due to a certain ‘autism of the two parties’¹⁷. There is a general climate of disappointment among political actors, in spite of the Dakar Agreement; they seem to miss the active period of 2006-07 and regret the return to the earlier situation of political centralisation.

Mauritania has more than 78 political parties, only 9 or 10 of which are represented in Parliament. In addition, political nomadism hinders the effective implementation of the inclusive national dialogue, particularly if the context for this dialogue is lacking¹⁸ (weakness of the Parliament).

Nevertheless, Mauritania does not appear to be in a position where a national union government is needed, although to ensure the ‘continuity’ of the Mauritanian state, the democracy of the institutions must be increased¹⁹.

Evaluation of political stability

‘Good governance comes from two decades of difficulties’, declared President Abdel Aziz during his meeting²⁰ with MEPs. Although the need to support the government in order to strengthen political stability has clearly been expressed, drive for reform must be consensual and cannot come from government proactivism alone²¹.

The UNDP is developing a 36-month programme on conflict prevention and strengthening social cohesion in Mauritania with an estimated budget of around EUR 3.6 million (USD 5 million), the aim of which is to prevent the risk of tension by fostering social cohesion and citizenship and developing policies for the fair distribution of resources. This programme is in line with national priorities on poverty reduction, promoting human rights and establishing the rule of law.

By introducing a national and local framework for consultation and conflict management mechanisms, it aims to prompt a change in attitudes. According to the UNDP draft document,

¹⁵ Interview with the opposition on 15 February 2010.

¹⁶ Briefing note for the EU parliamentary delegation on its visit to Mauritania from the RFD, 18 February 2010.

¹⁷ Interview with the diplomatic corps on 15 February 2010.

¹⁸ Interview with the UNDP on 15 February 2010.

¹⁹ Interview with the Foreign Minister, Ould Mouknass, on 15 February 2010.

²⁰ Interview with President Abdel Aziz on 17 February 2010.

²¹ Interview with the diplomatic corps on 15 February 2010.

‘allegations’ of discrimination and unfair distribution of resources need to be addressed, which represent fertile ground for socio-political unrest.

The issue of unfair distribution of wealth has in fact been raised by various civil society actors²², who are also critical of the lack of consultation of the voluntary sector by the state, which ‘would not involve it in important work’. The same ruling classes have been in power for 40 years, still from the same hegemonic alliances. The first potential conflict is linked to the fragility of social cohesion, in addition to the problems of ethnic coexistence and unfair distribution of wealth²³.

However, with some 3 000 associations, civil society seems overweight²⁴. This is largely due to the ease of obtaining authorisation from the Ministry of the Interior.

For civil society to be a factor in political stability, it would have to be given support in terms of project management and supervision, and not purely in terms of finance. ‘Our capacity needs to be strengthened through technical and logistical support’, declared the representative of the Mauritanian Association for Human Rights (AMDH)²⁵.

Furthermore, the issue of the weakness of the judiciary has also been identified as a factor in political instability. In a report published just before the EP delegation’s visit, the president of the national bar association was condemnatory about justice in his country. The role of the lawyer seems to be ‘less important in the current legal system, which is increasingly unfair, unjust and arbitrary’²⁶. The president of the bar association notes the constant interference by the state in the day-to-day work of magistrates, arguing that ‘court rulings are issued at the say-so of the prosecution service, which means that the courts are basically there to rubber stamp decisions taken outside the courts’, and concluding that ‘criminal trials are handled by the prosecution service, which represents the executive. Clearly this leads to the exploitation of justice and the absence of any real separation of powers in Mauritania.’²⁷

The situation is also tainted by problems linked to the coexistence of positive law and sharia law, the absence of a school for the judiciary (95% of magistrates are trained at the Islamic Higher Institute of Education and Research (ISERI, a Saudi-financed institute under the control of the Ministry of Justice and Islamic Orientation²⁸) and finally the fact that the law on legal aid has not yet been adopted, which has harmful consequences for access to justice for the most vulnerable²⁹.

III – Migration

²² Interview with civil society representatives on 15 February 2010.

²³ Interview with the UNDP on 15 February 2010.

²⁴ Interview with Prime Minister Ould Laghdaf on 17 February 2010.

²⁵ Interview with civil society on 15 February 2010.

²⁶ Source: report by the president of the national bar association, February 2010.

²⁷ Ibid.

²⁸ Cf. ‘Le rôle de l’islam dans la société mauritanienne contemporaine’, Constant Hamès, CNRS-EHESS

²⁹ Interview with civil society on 15 February 2010.

Mauritania is strategically important for the EU, particularly for certain Member States, since it is a transit point for migrants travelling from western sub-Saharan Africa to Europe, and the Canary Islands in particular.

From 2005 to 2010, net immigration was 0.6 migrants per thousand Mauritians, while in 2010 immigrants represented 2.9% of the population. Of this figure, 42.2% were women³⁰.

The national strategy on combating illegal immigration (adopted in March 2006) aims to prevent the flow of illegal migrants passing through the country. However, it fails to take into account the potential benefits of migration, nor does it propose any positive regulation.

A EUR 2.45 million programme entitled 'Actions in support of Mauritania in its fight to reduce illegal immigration towards the EU' was carried out in 2006 covering capacity building for detection and apprehension, improving administrative detention conditions and assistance with voluntary return, and legislative review. The programme was implemented by the UNHCR, IOM and FIIAPP with the help of NGOs such as the Spanish Red Cross and the Mauritanian Red Crescent.

The National Indicative Programme (NIP) makes provision for a specific 'migration' measure with a budget of EUR 8 million. The aim is to support and strengthen the capacities for managing, monitoring and planning migration flows by:

- improving the quality of procedures carried out at border crossing points;
- providing financial and institutional support to services in charge of surveillance of the national territory;
- training staff responsible for migration;
- improving the information system for legal migrants and raising public awareness about illegal immigration;
- reviewing the legal framework and criminal system (criminalisation of trafficking);
- offering recommendations for the economic integration of migrants;
- developing a regional and international partnership for the positive management of migration flows.

Migration flows

'We have become the Maginot line of the EU, which must help us deal with this situation.'³¹ Yet the Minister of the Interior has indicated to MEPs that year-on-year, migration flows are falling.

Prior to 2005, in order to get to Europe through northern Morocco, African migrants used small dugout canoes to cross the Strait of Gibraltar. Further south on the Atlantic coast, in the sea between the western Sahara (under Moroccan control) and the Canary Islands, this was less common, although there are reports that these were already being used in the 1990s. In any case, the tightening of controls along the Mediterranean since 2002 has persuaded migrants who are heading for Europe to rethink their route.

³⁰ Source: International Organisation for Migration (IOM).

³¹ Interview with Prime Minister Ould Laghdaf on 17 February 2010.

As a result, Mauritania has found itself at the centre of West African migration, and in 2005 Nouadhibou became one of the gateways to Europe. The closure of the border with the Western Sahara has effectively prevented migrants from getting to Morocco. In addition, increased searches of Mauritanian fishing boats sailing to the Canary Islands or the Iberian Peninsula have prevented Africans who boarded at Nouadhibou or bought their passage from the captain from disembarking. Finally, the completion in 2004 of the tarmac road between Nouakchott and Nouadhibou, which opened in 2005, has also had an impact on migration flows, allowing migrants to travel to the north of the country³².

In April 2006, the EU responded to the crisis caused by the flow of migrants to the Canary Islands by setting up a rapid response programme. Surveillance patrols have been formed and equipment supplied in order to control borders and territorial waters under the aegis of Frontex (the agency responsible for managing the EU's external borders)³³.

In 2006, the Mauritanian authorities turned a school into a detention centre, dubbed 'Guantanamo' by locals and migrants³⁴.

Nouadhibou detention centre

In 2006, 4 500 migrants were sent to the Nouadhibou detention centre, even though officially the centre can only accommodate 240 (in two halls). Since early 2010, only 72 people have passed through the centre.

During the visit by the EP delegation on 16 February 2010, the centre was unoccupied. However, MEPs could see the insalubrious sanitary conditions (no doors to the toilets or showers, despite the fact that this is a mixed centre, and only two working showers) and rundown buildings in a visible state of neglect. The centre is run by the local authorities, while charities such as the Red Cross and Red Crescent look after and feed detainees. The centre also accommodates children, despite having no dedicated facilities.

Before the centre opened, migrants were imprisoned. According to the NGOs, however, the bilateral readmission agreements with Spain led to the opening of the centre. This has had a negative impact on Nouadhibou, which has always been a place of immigration, offering considerable opportunity for integration³⁵.

The Mauritanian authorities have voiced their concern over the role of remote EU border guards which the EU wanted to bring into play³⁶.

³² Cf. 'Destination Nouadhibou pour les migrants africains', by Armelle Choplin, Université Paris-Est Marne-la Vallée and Jérôme Lombard, IRD, LPED Marseille.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Interview with NGOs in Nouadhibou on 16 February 2010.

³⁵ Ibid.

³⁶ Interview with Mr Boulkheir on 15 February 2010.

NGOs working in Nouadhibou have noticed that the status of migrant – or indeed human being – has been replaced by that of illegal immigrant, while the authorities are playing a numbers game that in no way reflects the situation in Mauritania or Africa in general³⁷. Similarly, pressure from the EU has led to people being arrested unlawfully in their homes or at sea following an increase in the number of identity checks.

It should be noted that these people come from countries where a visa is not required to enter Mauritania, and that the EU policy entails exporting the European concepts of ‘chosen migration’, tourist visas and residence permits, previously unknown in Mauritania. The description of Nouadhibou as a place of transit has not only challenged the city’s urban identity, but has given it ‘population management and border control targets, unheard of in a city which has a long tradition of welcoming people from other countries’³⁸.

IV – Fisheries agreement³⁹

Mauritania is a major trading partner for the European Union owing to its natural resources, and particularly its iron ore exports and its fishery resources.

Fishing represents more than 40% of the country’s foreign revenue and 25% of its budget receipts, altogether totalling more than EUR 150 million. It provides direct or indirect employment for more than 36 000 people.

The fisheries sector accounts for between 10% and 12% of GDP, depending on whether revenue from the agreement is included in gross domestic product. Therefore, fishing remains a strategic sector, not only for addressing the macroeconomic imbalance, in which it plays a key role, but also for its dynamic contribution to the country’s development in terms of jobs, food security and revenue, as well as acting as a driving force for other sectors of the national economy.

The Protocol setting out the fishing opportunities and financial contribution provided for in the Fisheries Partnership Agreement between the European Community and the Islamic Republic of Mauritania for the period 1 August 2008 to 31 July 2012⁴⁰ aims to strengthen the fisheries sector and ensure its economic integration through greater support for the industry. The protocol proposes a reduction in fishing opportunities compared with the previous protocol (for the period 1 August 2006 to 31 July 2008), reflecting the reduction in requirements of the European fleet (European vessels were not using all the fishing opportunities) and scientific opinions on fishery resources.

³⁷ Interview with NGOs on 16 February 2010.

³⁸ Cf. ‘Nouadhibou: ville de transit ?’, Jocelyne Streiff-Fénart and Philippe Poutignat, *Revue européenne des migrations internationales*, 2008 (24) pp. 193-217.

³⁹ As a trade agreement, the fisheries agreement was not affected by the freeze on cooperation between the EU and Mauritania following the coup d’état of 5 August 2008.

⁴⁰ Council Regulation (EC) No 704/2008, OJ L 203, 31.7.2008.

The financial contribution is set at EUR 86 million for the first year, EUR 76 million for the second year, EUR 73 million for the third year and EUR 70 million for the fourth year. Of this contribution, the following has been ring-fenced as financial support for the implementation of a national fisheries policy: EUR 11 million in the first year, EUR 16 million in the second year, EUR 18 million in the third year and EUR 20 million in the fourth year, including an annual grant of EUR 1 million for the Banc d'Arguin National Park (PNBA). However, some concerns remain over the ability to implement budget support for Mauritania's fishing industry.

The Mauritanian authorities have described the fisheries agreement as 'relatively balanced, given the balance of power', and as addressing many of the country's concerns⁴¹. However, there is a problem with the boarding of vessels, which has been termed unlawful⁴². A joint committee tasked with this matter was due to meet in Nouakchott from 22 to 25 March 2010.

Finally, the next fisheries agreement should focus on the development of port facilities in order to increase the benefits for the surrounding region⁴³. This comment might seem surprising, given the amount of money set aside to finance the implementation of the national fisheries policy. There could even be concern that these amounts are not effectively invested in the development of port infrastructure, for example in Nouadhibou.

Visit to the Port of Nouadhibou

The main landing points are Nouakchott and Nouadhibou. Nouakchott is the main export centre for fresh produce, while Nouadhibou handles frozen and chilled produce.

Nearly all fish is landed at Nouadhibou, which has an industrial port used for commercial fishing, and an artisanal port in the Baie du Levrier for small-scale and coastal fishing using selective gear with an overall length of no more than 26 metres.

The management system in Mauritania is based on controlling entry-level fishing through a licensing system and the application of technical management techniques. Changing pressure on fishery resources has shown that this system is not controlling overcapacity. Therefore, Mauritania is gradually adopting the development plan approach, which should evolve from a traditional licence-based management system to a quota system based on provisional estimates and transferable quotas. However, for the time being the system still continues to operate as it did previously⁴⁴.

The Port of Nouadhibou was originally built in 1979 with French funding, and has developed thanks to technical support and aid from the EU. In 2009, a EUR 20 million expansion plan financed by Spain was unveiled, which consists of lengthening the quay and building a new 120 000 m² facility.

⁴¹ Interview with Prime Minister Ould Laghdaf on 17 February 2010.

⁴² Interview with the diplomatic corps on 15 February 2010.

⁴³ Interview with regional and local authorities on 16 February 2010.

⁴⁴ For more information, see http://www.fao.org/fishery/countrysector/FI-CP_MR/fr.

The port authorities have acknowledged the good cooperation with the EU and their wish to maintain partnerships with European ports (in addition to the agreements signed with the ports of Le Havre, Nantes, Saint Nazaire and Las Palmas)⁴⁵.

Shipwreck removal programme

Nouadhibou has one of the largest shipwreck sites in the world, with more than 100 wrecks in the port and surrounding area representing both a hazard to shipping and an environmental threat. The origins of this shipwreck site date back to 1980, when Mauritians decided to invest in new vessels during the nationalisation of fishery resources. Obsolete or damaged boats were abandoned in the bay. In view of Mauritania's iron ore production, there was little incentive to recycle the metal in these vessels. In any case, the shipwreck site could represent a source of employment for the local population⁴⁶.

However, these wrecks now represent a real hazard to shipping, leading to a reduction in traffic over the past few years, particularly for fishing vessels, with evident economic and social repercussions for Mauritania.

The EUR 26 million shipwreck removal agreement was signed on 10 October 2006 (Stabex Fund). Work was due to commence in 2007 and was expected to take 36 months. However, the project has still not begun.

The project is expected to lead to an improvement in shipping conditions, increased safety in the Bay of Nouadhibou, environmental protection and additional administrative capacity. The environmental aspect was taken into account in order to prevent the risk of pollution.

Conclusions

Parliamentary institutions must be improved, particularly by the EU through support for governance, both in terms of infrastructure and training for administrative staff. The inclusive national dialogue could take place in a suitable framework (and not just in the media) and on social projects.

The involvement of civil society in proposed reforms should be actively sought by the Mauritanian authorities as a vehicle for national cohesion. Similarly, the aid programme for civil society should include technical support in terms of project management and lending.

Therefore, members of the EP delegation to Mauritania have recommended that:

- ✓ part of the governance aid should be ring-fenced for structural support for the Parliament,
- ✓ a joint parliamentary committee should be put in charge of constitutional reform and the electoral process,

⁴⁵ Interview with the Chief Executive of the Port of Nouadhibou on 17 February 2010.

⁴⁶ Cf. 'Consigned to a watery grave', Berny Sebe, *Geographical*, April 2007.

- ✓ technical and logistical support for civil society and a government incentive to work in consultation with operators in the voluntary sector.

For members of the EP delegation to Mauritania, the issue of migration cannot be considered solely from a security point of view, and calls have been made for the closure of the Nouadhibou detention centre.

Finally, in terms of future activity, both delegations have agreed to meet once a year, alternately in Mauritania and at the European Parliament. MEPs have also recommended to their Mauritanian counterparts that they request technical support from the President of the European Parliament. This support could potentially be provided by the Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy.

Annexes

- Conclusions of the sixth interparliamentary meeting
- Final programme
- List of members

**Conclusions of the Sixth Interparliamentary Meeting between the
European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries
and the Delegation from the Mauritanian Parliament**

Nouakchott, 18 February 2010

The European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries visited Mauritania from 15 to 18 February 2010. During its stay the Delegation, accompanied by a Mauritanian Parliamentary Delegation, held talks with the Presidents of the Parliamentary Chambers, the Minister for Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, and the Minister for the Interior and Decentralisation. It also had the honour of meeting the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister. The European Parliament Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries thanks the Mauritanian Parliament and authorities for the welcome and hospitality it received during its stay.

Members of the European Parliament also met parliamentary groups from the majority and opposition sides, political party leaders, leading figures from civil society, the press, representatives of various emigrant communities and the administrative and security authorities of the Dakhlet Nouadhibou region. The Delegation's visit to Mauritania had a twofold aim: first, to strengthen interparliamentary relations and second, to assess stability in Mauritania.

In the light of these meetings the two Delegations drew the following conclusions.

- There is a need to strengthen the Mauritanian parliamentary institutions, particularly in the fields of parliamentary business (assistance, training etc.), infrastructure (the seat of the two chambers) and administrative support (staffing) as part of the support for the process of governance provided by the European Union and its Member States. In this connection the Mauritanian party requested exceptional support from the European Union.
- Strengthening the parliamentary institutions in this way would also effectively enable an inclusive national dialogue to be set up, thus favouring the consolidation of democracy.
- There is a need to involve civil society in consultation procedures on issues of national interest. Moreover Mauritanian civil society should be supported by medium- and long-term management training programmes, particularly on financial management, in order to provide more effective ways of dealing with poverty, the conditions leading to the persistence of slavery in any form and its consequences, and under-development.
- Freedom of expression should be strengthened by opening up the media, particularly the audiovisual media, delivering real pluralism. In this regard the European party recommends the decriminalisation of press offences.

Such measures would also strengthen the stability of Mauritanian society, which would in a spirit of consensus determine the political reforms to be introduced to develop the country, improve access to basic services and combat poverty.

In the area of external relations, regional cooperation on both migration and security in the region was also considered, underlining the important role that Mauritania is obliged to play because of its geographical situation.

In implementing its migration policy the EU should also adjust to local realities and encourage the training of staff of government authorities. The migration question cannot be settled purely from the security point of view.

The fight against terrorism, a relatively new phenomenon in Mauritania, cannot be effective unless resources, the Mauritanian administration and the legal system are strengthened while respecting human rights. In this connection regional cooperation is essential and should be encouraged.

In the area of cooperation, and more particularly of the EU-Mauritania fishing agreement, special efforts should be made to benefit more from sectoral support, with the aim firstly of improving investment conditions in terms of infrastructure, and secondly of creating economic benefits, especially in employment, for the two parties.

Political instability has adversely affected implementation of the cooperation policy. Creating a coordination mechanism for cooperation in the various sectoral policies would be beneficial and would encourage a long-term view of the efforts being made.

As regards future activities, the two Delegations agreed to meet once a year, alternately in Mauritania and at the European Parliament. The Mauritanian Delegation felt that it should be assisted by a permanent administrative secretariat at the Mauritanian Parliament, to improve ongoing support and follow-up for relations between the two institutions. The secretariat's operating should be provided by the Mauritanian authorities, namely the Parliament and the institutions responsible for EU-Mauritania cooperation.

This mission by the Delegation for relations with the Maghreb countries and the Arab Maghreb Union was the first in the Islamic Republic of Mauritania since the resumption of European Union cooperation with Mauritania, as the last interparliamentary meeting was held in Nouakchott in May 2006. Chaired by Pier Antonio Panzeri (S&D, I), the Delegation comprised three other members: Cristian Dan Preda (PPE, Romania), Guido Milana (S&D, Italy) and Miguel Portas (GUE/NGL, Portugal).

The Mauritanian Delegation consisted of Mr Mohammed Abdellahi OULD GUELAYE, Chair, Mr Kamara Aly GUELADIO, Mr Mohammed El Moctar OULD ZAMEL, Ms Mariem MINT BILAL, Mr Moctar OULD BOUBACAR and Mr Moulaye Chrif OULD MOULAYE DRISS.



DELEGATION POUR LES RELATIONS AVEC LES PAYS DU MAGHREB

VI^{ème} Rencontre Interparlementaire Parlement Européen-Mauritanie

15-19 février 2010

PROGRAMME

Dimanche 14 février 2010

Soir Arrivées individuelles de l'Europe à l'aéroport international de Nouakchott Air France 20.55h
Accueil du Chef de Délégation de l'UE au salon d'honneur à l'aéroport

l'hôtel

Check in à

*Mercurie Marhaba
Ave abdel nasser, Nouakchott, Mauritanie
Tél. : 00 222 529 50 50 - Fax : 00 222 529 50 55*

21.30h Arrivée à l'hôtel et dîner à l'hôtel

Lundi 15 février 2010

Nouakchott

08h30 Départ de l'hôtel

9h00 Rencontre avec les **Etats Membres** (S.E. Eberhard Schanze - Allemagne, S.E. Alonso Dezcallar y Mazarred- Espagne, S.E. Michel Vandepoorter - France) -
Lieu: Locaux de la DUE

10h00 Rencontre avec le **Président de l'Assemblée Nationale**, M Messoud Ould Boulkheir.
Lieu: Assemblée Nationale.

11h00 Rencontre avec le **Président du Sénat**, M. Bah Mamadou Dit Mbaré
Lieu: Sénat.

11h45

Rencont

res conjointes avec **société civile et ONG:**

- SOS Esclave (M Boubakar Messaoud).
- FONADH (Forum National des ONGs Mauritanienne des droits de l'homme et des peuples) : M. Mamadou Moctar Sarr,

- AFCF (Association des femmes chef de famille) Amenitou Mint El Moctar, M. Gueye.
- AMDH (Ligue mauritanienne des droits de l'homme), Maitre Mine Ould Abdoullah, ICC (Initiative Citoyenne pour le changement), M. Diop Mohamedine.
- Association des Journalistes Mauritaniens.

Lieu: Locaux de la DUE

13h00 Déjeuner de travail avec les **journalistes** représentants les plus importants journaux (La Tribune), (Le Quotidien), (Nouakchott info), (journal Arabophone)
Lieu: Restaurant La Medina

15h00 Rencontre avec la **Ministre des Affaires Etrangères et de la Coopération**, Mme Naha Mint Hamdi Ould Mouknass
Lieu: Ministère des Affaires Etrangères

16h00 Rencontre avec les représentants des quatre groupes politiques de l'**opposition** à l'Assemblée Nationale.
Lieu: Assemblée Nationale.

17h00 M. Mohamed El Mounir, Chargé de Programme Prévention des Conflits M. Moustapha O Eleya, ANAIR (Agence des Réfugiés), M. Mohamed Lemine O Sidya, PESE (Programme d'éradication des séquelles de l'esclavage).
Lieu: Locaux du PNUD

18h30 Rencontre avec le **Ministre de l'Intérieur et de la décentralisation**, Mohammed Ould Boilil.
Lieu: Ministère de l'Intérieur

20h00 Dîner de travail offert par l'Assemblée Nationale

Mardi 16 février 2010

Nouadhibou

7h00 Départ et déplacement vers **Nouâdhibou** (Mauritania Airways 8.20am, arrivé 9.20am).

10h00 Arrivée à l'hôtel Sahel

10h30 Rencontre avec le **Wali** (gouverneur) et éventuellement avec les comandants de la police et de la gendarmerie.

11.00 Visite du **Centre de rétention**

12h00 Rencontre avec les **ONG** qui opèrent sur place (ex. Croix rouge espagnole, croissant rouge, Fondation CEAR, CARITAS, ALPD, Père Gerome AMDH, IEJI).

Lieu: locaux de l'ALPD

- 13h00 Invitation à déjeuner du Sénateur de Nouadibhou
- 15h00 Rencontre avec le Col. Cheikh Ould Ahmed Chef de la **DSPCM** (Délégation à la Surveillance des pêches et au contrôle en mer) et visite de la salle de contrôle du DSPCM .
- 16h00 **Visite de la baie** de Nouadhibou avec une vedette pour observer, entre autre, les épaves. La délégation sera accompagnée par le DSPCM et par les autorités portuaires.
- 20h00 Dîner de travail offert par le Wali

Mercredi 17 février 2010

Nouadhibou/Nouakchott

- 9h30 Visite du **port autonome de Nouadhibou**, accompagnés par le Directeur Général du Port. Si possible, visite d'une usine d'exportation de poisson.
- 11h00 Retour à l'aéroport
- 12h00 Départ du vol sur Nouakchott (Mauritania Airways, arrivée à 13h).
- 13h30 Déjeuner rapide
- 14h00 M. Preda (MPE) rencontre 60 **étudiants** du Lycée français de Nouakchott. *Lieu: DUE*
- 15h00 Rencontre avec le **Premier Ministre**, M. Moulaye Ould Mohamed Laghdaf.
- 16h00 Rencontre avec le **Président** de la République M. Mohamed Ould Abdel Aziz.
- 17h45 Rencontre avec les représentants des groupes politiques de la **majorité** à l'Assemblée Nationale.
Lieu: Assemblée Nationale.
- 19h15 Retour à l'hôtel
- 20h30 Dîner de travail offert par la Ministre des Affaires étrangères

Jeudi 18 février 2010

Nouakchott

- 9h00 Rencontre avec les **responsables des bureaux de Coopération des Etats Membres** présents (SCAC, AFD, AECI, GTZ, Coopération italienne), dans les locaux de la DUE

- 10h30 Rencontre avec M. Mouloud, leader du parti **UFP** (opposition).
Lieu: locaux du parti
- 11h15 Rencontre avec M. Daddah, leader du parti **RFD** (opposition)
Lieu: locaux du parti
- 12h15 Rencontre avec les chefs des partis de la majorité qui ne sont pas représentés dans un groupe parlementaire
Lieu : Assemblée nationale
- 13h20 Déjeuner de travail avec les membres de la délégation mauritanienne auprès de l'Assemblée Parlementaire CAP-UE
- 15h30 Rencontre avec M. Mohammed Mahmoud Ould Mohammed Lemin, leader de l'**UPR**.
Lieu: locaux du parti
- 16h30 Conférence de presse
Lieu: DUE
- 17h30 Débriefing avec les Etats Membres.
Lieu: DUE
- 20h00 Réception
du Chef de Délégation de l'UE
Suivie du
départ de la Délégation du Parlement européen vers l'UE.

PARLEMENT EUROPEEN

DELEGATION POUR LES RELATIONS AVEC LES PAYS DU MAGHREB

VIEME RENCONTRE INTERPARLEMENTAIRE PE/MAURITANIE

NOUAKCHOTT AND NOUADHIBOU

15-19 FÉVRIER 2010

LISTE DES PARTICIPANTS

Membres (4)

M. Pier Antonio **PANZERI**, Président
 M. Cristian Dan **PREDA**
 M. Guido **MILANA**
 M. Miguel **PORTAS**

<u>Groupe</u>	<u>Pays</u>
S&D	Italie
PPE	Roumanie
S&D	Italie
GUE/NGL	Portugal

PPE	Groupe du PPE au Parlement Européen
S&D	Groupe de l'Alliance Progressiste des Socialistes & Démocrates au Parlement européen
Verts/ALE	Les Verts/Alliance Libre Européenne au Parlement Européen
GUE/NGL	Gauche Unitaire Européenne/Gauche Verte Nordique/Groupe Parlementaire Européen

Staff DG EXPO (2)

Mme Isabelle MONTROYA	Administrateur
Mme Nicole DEVOS	Assistante administrative

Interprètes (2)

M. Piorgiorgio GINEFRA, Chef d'équipe	FR/IT
Mme Martine CHAMPROMIS	IT/FR