



The Security Policy Effects of the Algerian-Moroccan-Spanish Debate on Gas on Europe in the Light of the Russian-Ukrainian War¹

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Abstract:

The following research aims at analysing the energy and security challenges that faces the current MENA region in accordance with the Russian-Ukrainian conflict. It tries to give a comprehensive look upon the situation that defines today's political and economic world. At the beginning, it starts with the assessment of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict and its consequences on Europe and the Maghreb. In the next part, it focuses on the various issues that complicate the situation in North Africa regarding energy and security factors. Then the article goes on to describe the gas pipelines that connects the two areas (Europe and North Africa) and it clarifies the threats that hinder the cooperation between them. With a short introduction of the role of Tunisia in this debate, the research finally tries to explore the possibilities in renewable energy resources regarding the substitution of Russian energy supplies on the European market. In the conclusion, the article wanted to give a short and brief, but thorough analysis about the energy and security situation in the region and what solutions are there for the parties to ensure their interests in this complex political, economic and security competition.

Keywords:

Energy, Gas, North Africa, Russian-Ukrainian conflict, security policy

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Introduction

The Algerian-Moroccan-Spanish gas debate is a very important geopolitical issue in the MENA-region which has also effects in and is effected by the European countries and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict or war. The theme is very complex, and to understand it correctly, one has to take into consideration as much aspects of the problems as it is possible, since it takes a lot of research to understand at least the basics of the connections between the intertwining causes. There are mainly three part of this scene which complement each other: the Algerian-Moroccan debate on Western Sahara and other issues, the geopolitical realities of the European Union and the Russian-Ukrainian war. 24 February 2022 was a fatal and important starting-point of the clashes in the East, and basically the consequence of the sanctions Europe had imposed on Russia was that Russia weaponized its gas resources to blackmail the continent. This way, Europe had no chance but to look for other sources of petrol and natural gas, so the MENA region came as one of the most favourable areas, which could replace the decreasing Russian gas supplies. However, this area is not easy to comprehend, since it has its own problems and rivalries between countries which are supported by traditional Cold War superpowers who retained their status until the present. Also, there is the problem of colonization as a burden of several former countries, who took part in the division of the continent in the Berlin Conference of 1884-1885. The region that concerns us for the time being in connection with the subject is the North African area, especially Morocco and Algeria. While the abovementioned events took place in Europe and the East, the North African region was in turmoil. Since the 1960s, rivalry was present between the two large Arab countries, and it hasn't withered since. Especially at the turn of 2020, there have been a lot of controversial issues, which affected diplomatic relations and gas resource supplies between the countries. This way, the MENA-region and Europe, as well as the Russian-Ukrainian war have created an unprecedented scale of intertwined and complex conflicts, which has serious ramifications not only for regional, but also for world politics. In my article, I would like to explore in depth these realities.

The Russian-Ukrainian Conflict and the MENA Region

One of the main triggers of the events was the war, which began on 24 February 2022. Already in 2020, there were real difficulties economically all around the globe due to the spread of the COVID-19 disease and its later effects. The increasing want for petrol however blossomed in 2021, when there was an energy hunger. The problem was that one tragic event led to another, and with the beginning of the Russian invasion a series of problems arose concerning energy issues.

First of all, the Russians used energy prices as a weapon and blackmailed the Europeans with the withholding of gas reserves and the rising of the gas prices on the market. All this in due time took the Europeans to cooperate against Russia, and they

imposed heavy sanctions on the eastern country regarding their economy. Russia's answer was again the raising of gas prices, so Europe could do sooner or later nothing more than to turn to other regions to diversify their resources (Hafner, 2022).

Since the Russian-Ukrainian conflict brought about these problems for Europe, it had to turn geopolitically to other parts of the world in search of petrol and natural gas resources. The first sign of this was that all the major European leaders, like Olaf Scholz, Emmanuel Macron and Mario Draghi went to Algiers to find a common solution for the issues that had been bothering the continent (Fasanotti, 2022). The countries of North Africa understood the seriousness of these events soon, and they wanted to appear as a reliable partner to support the new interest of the Europeans, however, they had had from before serious alignments with other great powers, like Algeria with Russia, who is its main weapon supporter. Because the Russians are important business partners of Algeria (since the Cold War), they have to thread carefully between the two sides – given that Russia and the West are in confrontation now –, so their diplomacy is very cautious nowadays.

The diplomatic carefulness of the countries can be well-percieved in the vote which was cast at the UN General Assembly on the condemnation of the Russian-Ukrainian war on 2 March 2022, where Algeria abstained from voting and Morocco didn't participate in the process (Belkaid, 2022). This way, it can be assessed that the Maghrebian diplomacy was very cautious and gentle regarding its relations with both sides, since it saw the business opportunity in the relation with Europe, but it didn't want to anger the superpowers which were connected to it from before. Especially Algeria was in a difficult position, because it has a strong and long-lasting relationship with Russia, but in the new situation it doesn't want to waste its opportunities with the European countries. The maneuvering of Algeria has to be delicate, since its partners in the East don't appreciate their turn to the European states, however, Algerian diplomacy is ready to modify its relations in order to handle the situation. From the beginning of the war the country thus decided that it takes an equal distance from the West and the East as well (Cafiero, 2022).

While Algeria decidedly supports Russia, and has good diplomatic relations with the Eastern power, it has to be aware that with doing business with its northern partners (the Europeans) there will be conflict, and this way it has to thread cautiously. So in spite that it held joint military excursions with the Russians, it opened an embassy in Kyiv, thus the Western countries see that it is not all-supportive of the Russian aggression. However, Algeria is still the third greatest importer of Russian weapons and thus has to show fidelity to them as well. This is a hard balancing maneuver which makes it difficult for Algerian diplomacy to deal with the recent issues regarding the gas debate and the Russian-Ukrainian conflict (Glez, 2023). Moroccans have to deal with the diplomatic pressure as well, and since there was a scandal in the European Parliament that Moroccans have bribed some European representatives, the country felt that it

owed the West with some support, so it was one of the first African countries to support Ukraine with tanks militarily (Holleis, 2023).

Altogether it can be concluded, that the Eastern dependency of the European countries could be reduced and it could turn well to the West and the Maghreb countries so Algeria and the US will be a very reliable supplier of petrol and gas resources for the abovementioned countries. Thus the Western and North African powers could easily be the new source of energy for the European countries. Russia this way could lose its previous preeminent position as energy provider for the region (Hafner, 2022).

The Moroccan-Algerian Debate at the Base of the Conflict

To understand better the situation, it is necessary to go to the roots of the conflict, which lies in the relation between Algeria and Morocco. The two countries have a long-standing rivalry against each other, which goes way back in time. It can be said that in the North African region basically the two countries fight for the leading position of the area, and there are a lot of problems that poison the relationship between them. One of these issues is the Western Sahara question, which emerged in the '70s, around the time Morocco annexed a large part of the country. There is also difference in which superpowers were they supported by in the Cold War era and after: Algeria is more aligned to Russia and Morocco to France and the US.

There is a competition as well between the two countries regarding the energy debate: although Algeria has the most petrol and gas resources, Morocco is also dominant in the region, and this is why they fight for the leading position. Both of the countries had (and still have) internal problems, Morocco had to fight the political turmoil and turn to liberalization of its trade, while Algeria had a recent upheaval: in 2019 the Hirak movement emerged and there were protests all over the country, so it also had to fight its demons. In the meantime, both countries wanted to gain an advantage, thus they concentrated to modify their foreign policy in order to fight for more dominance in the region. There is also the issue of Western Sahara, in which both countries want to get the upper hand, and they were willing to sacrifice a lot for winning the debate. In 1963, the rivalry between the two countries went so far as there was an open confrontation which was named the Sand War. However, it only lasted some months so the conflict didn't escalate (Fakir, 2023). The Western Sahara debate is so important that the UN sent a peacekeeping mission in 1991 to the area called MINURSO to handle the delicate balance between the sides. The mission is still on the ground, and according to some sources, its results cannot yet determine what fate the country will have, or which side would gain the upper hand, but the international community definitely want a solution to the problem (Besenyő, 2020).

Regarding to certain opinions, the security threats that this region (Western Sahara) poses also challenges the European community in its relations with the MENA



region and unless there is a definite solution to the problem, it will hinder the political balance in the area (Besenyő, 2009). There were also other debated issues between Algeria and Morocco, for example the Trump administration's decision to support Morocco's claim for Western Sahara in exchange for the rationalization of the relations between Morocco and Israel. The border debates also renewed between the Polisario and Morocco; hence, Algeria was also in the picture when a conflict broke out. Algeria and Morocco had a standoff as well when some Algerian truck drivers were killed and Algeria suspected Morocco to carry out the attack, but it wasn't proved. Thus there were a lot of debated issues between the two countries (Dworkin, 2022). From this it can be concluded that the fight between the two countries for the dominant position of the region led straight to the gas debate that occurred after the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, which created possibility for the European countries to look for other energy supporting regions.

There was another problem: since Morocco rationalized its relations with Israel, and in exchange, the US recognized its rights to Western Sahara, the Algerian politics became very angry, and there have been diplomatic problems, for the Algerians threatened and then closed the Gaz-Maghreb-Europe gas pipeline, which transmitted gas to Morocco (france24.com, 2021). Instead, the Algerians will export gas to Spain via an underwater pipeline called Medgaz, which doesn't reach Morocco but runs straight to Spain from Algeria (africanews.com, 2021). In 2022, there was another issue, which deteriorated relations between Spain and Algeria: Spain sided with Morocco on the issue of Western Sahara, causing tensions with the Algerians, who regard this case very important. Algeria thus suspended a friendship agreement with the Spanish, who changed their view about the fate of the Saharan territory (aljazeera.com, 2022). From all this, it can be assessed that Algeria, who provided the majority of Western European and North African gas supplies became in a difficult position, since diplomatically it lost some leverage. However, Morocco and Spain also depends on Algeria's gas resources, thus the North African country may be in advantage regarding the regional dominance. Nevertheless, Morocco also boasts a very successful diplomatic machinery which functioned very well during the last years and gained political advantage for the country.

The other side of the conflict includes the European countries and the US. As it has been mentioned before, the United States reversed its former position on Western Sahara regarding Morocco, because it formalized its relations with Israel. As a compensation, the Trump administration acknowledged Morocco's right to Western Sahara, and Algeria was quick to demonstrate against this. Spain also went to support Morocco's claim over the territory, while France remained positive on the Moroccan side of opinion. However, for example, Italy made a serious contribution to Algerian politics and diplomacy when in 2022 they signed a petrol contract with Algerian president Abdelmajid Tebboune (Al-Fawiris, 2022). Thus it can be concluded that the

European countries and the US were very active in strengthening their petrol resources via the North African region.

Short Introduction of the Gas Pipelines Concerning the Region

There are a lot of gas pipelines that connect Africa (more precisely the North African region) with Europe. Besides the LNG transport that is going on in the Mediterranean, these pipelines constitute the main arteries in the blood circulation of the gas trade between the areas. There are basically four important routes that characterize the trade in the region. The first one is the Gaz-Maghreb-Europe (GME) line, which would flow from Algeria via Morocco to Spain, but it was closed – as was mentioned before – due to debates between Algeria and Morocco. This pipeline is one of the most vital sources for the two countries to acquire natural gas so it really hurt Morocco and Spain regarding their gas revenues. Spain is also very concerned of its possible lack of resources that could hit the country in the winter hard (africanews.com, 2021).

However, there is another gas pipeline that supports the European country with gas resources, but it is an underwater tunnel called Medgaz, which runs from Algeria straight to Spain through the Mediterranean Sea. This pipeline could thus correct the lack of resources the country has to endure because of the debate between the two North African states, but still doesn't count as a full support for Spain. Nevertheless, Spain created an opportunity for Morocco with giving access to the closed pipeline from the other side and thus supporting the country with gas supplies. This of course angered Algeria, and it further alienated the countries from each other. There is a third source of gas resources that is flowing between the two continents, which connects Algeria with Italy, and is called Transmed. This pipeline goes from Algeria through Tunisia to Italy, and – as it has been mentioned before – with the renewal of the contract, Algeria transports even more gas to the country in the future. Finally, there is an ongoing debate between Algeria and Morocco to reach the Nigerian sources of gas: the two countries are competing that who will acquire the huge amount of resource from the Sahel region. There are plans to build it to Morocco, but it would run through lots of countries, including Benin, Togo and Ghana, while the Algerian pipeline – which was already named Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline – would go through Niger from Nigeria across the Sahara. There is now a great debate between the two regional powers who will get the upper hand in this competition (Shawamreh, 2023).

The Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline has stirred up debates as well between Morocco and Algeria. Both countries are at pains to exert their influence over the region by taking part in the new Nigerian gas project. Morocco would like to create the Nigeria-Morocco Gas Pipeline, which would go through at least 13 countries in West Africa, but it would solve its gas difficulties and would give a huge leverage to Rabat against Algiers. The Moroccan idea is to connect the Nigerian gas pipeline with the already existing GME



Maghreb-Europe tubes, which would then provide gas also to Spain and Portugal, bypassing Algeria and excluding it from the profits. Of course, Algeria wants the original idea of the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline, which would run through Niger, but it has the disadvantages of crossing a desert area that is filled with jihadist groups that hinder the production and the transportation through the pipeline. This also would give an advantage to one of the countries as a relevant supplier of gas to the European continent (thearabweekly.com, 2023).

In conclusion, it can be assumed that the pipelines connecting North Africa with Europe will be of major importance regarding the replacement of the decreasing reliance on the Russian gas supplies which Europe is willing to sanction at this period. Algeria this way can become a regional leading power due to the recent events that took place on the European continent, and the Russian-Ukrainian war and the North African dominance fight has its connections in this relation.

Threats Obstructing the Construction of the Pipelines and the Creation of a North African-European Gas Cooperation

There are many current issues ongoing in the North African area that could become a nuisance for the common interests of the two regions. One of them is political instability which has manifested itself severely during recent times. There are practically inestimable coup d'états that happened just in the last five years, and the most recent of them was the military revolt in Niger. The rebellion not only put a Russian-affiliated government at the head of the country, but it seriously damaged the relations of Niger especially with France, but also with the other European powers. The other problematic issue was that the coup not only cut the ties between Niger and Europe, but it hinders the construction of the pipeline connecting Nigeria with either Morocco or Algeria, thus it prevents the two regions from doing business with each other. Mohamed Bazoum, the previous president supported Europe, while General Abdourahmane Tchiani is pro-Russian and this puts Niger in an anti-Europe position, which cuts the opportunities of the export-import possibilities (Aris, 2023).

Besides the several coups that happened in the area, there are other negative effects that makes difficult the situation on the ground. One factor that adds to these problematic issues is terrorism, which is overly present in North Africa and is a current and present danger for the African communities. Both Algeria and Morocco – albeit to varying degrees – is affected by the chaos that these elements can cause, and the security concern they create is very high. Algeria perhaps is less exposed to the attacks of the radicals, however it also has a lot of ties to the fundamentalist organizations. To just sum up the most important, there are a few cells that are worth mentioning. One of the first Islamist organizations that was established on Algerian soil was called Mouvement

Islamique Armée/ Armed Islamic Movement, which was founded by Mustafa Bouyali who was a committed follower of Egyptian radical theoretician Sayyid Qutb.

The structure of the group was built of smaller cells which cooperated and together formed a larger organization that choose the armed approach and could be called a jihadist movement. Although was not a terrorist organization, the Front Islamique Du Salut (FIS) was a fundamentalist and Islamist party or association that even participated in the Algerian elections. Its leaders were Abassi Madani and Ali Belhaj. Belhaj was the more influential of the two and he professed an anti-Western credo. Set aside the political wing of the organisation, there was also a military side of the FIS, which was called Armée Islamique du Salut (AIS), which was founded by the radical islamist Abdel Qadir Shabbouti or General Shabbouti. With his leadership, the group started to organize an armed resistance and military maneuvers were planned against the government (Botha, 2008).

Morocco has also had its share of fundamentalist and terrorist activities. To start with, one can enumerate some extremist or fundamentalist groups that existed or still exist in the country. For example, Islail al-Khatib created an organization called Jam'yya al-Ba'th al-Islami (Association of Islamic Resurrection), which had a clear Islamist affiliation and one of its main ideologic role model was the Muslim Brotherhood. Having said that, it can be concluded that the Al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun (MB) was also present in the country, especially in Casablanca. It can never be overemphasized what effects the organization has on Islamic life wherever it appears. However, due to the strict royal roots of the monarchy the organization couldn't thrive in the Moroccan environment so it had to stay in hiding from the public eye. There was also the Al-Shabiba (Moroccan Youth Association) organization. The leader of the early-created group was Abdel Karim Mouti, and it was a radical organization that was influenced also by Sayyid Qutb and the Egyptian MB movement.

The cell was present in the country for only a short period until its banning in 1975. Nevertheless, Al-Shabiba had smaller parts which diverged from it and thrived on their own. One of this was the Al-Gama'a al-Islamiyya (Islamic Group or Rabat group). By its name one can assume the ideologies it followed. There was also the Al-Adl wal Ihasne established by Abdesslam Yassin. It was also a radical fundamentalist organization which caused turmoil in the country. One of the most striking incidents of terrorism in Morocco occurred on 16 May 2003: five simultaneous bombs exploded in Casablanca in which 45 people died. In connection with the bombings, there was an organization which got the attention of the Moroccan security forces: it was the Groupe Islamique Combattant Marocain (Moroccan Islamic Combat Group). Its leader was Abdelkrim Thami Mejjati. The organization also had an armed cell, led by Saad Houssaini who was trained in Afghanistan and returned from there to fight in the name of Islam. There were also several other members of the organization who were arrested for planning or executing attacks in Morocco (Botha, 2008). There is also an opinion that the terrorism in the North African region is due to a serious political upheaval and a deep economic



instability, and these are the main reasons for the appearance of the phenomenon (Besenyő, 2007). Thus it can be concluded that both countries are at risk since terrorist activities and Islamic fundamentalism both exist in these areas, and it can be sad that the security concerns that these threats cause can seriously hinder the possibilities of the construction of a Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline that would give more opportunities to the European Union to diversify its gas resources. Thus the European Union's opportunities can be seriously questioned if these security gaps won't be filled in reasonable time.

There is also the issue of migration, which is very actual at this time. Africa is one of the main continents responsible for the vast amount of migrating people from the third world to Europe in search of a better life. The problem of migration is a serious issue and it greatly influences the everyday life of the European communities living in hardship not only because of the Russian-Ukrainian war but also because of the large number of migrants that live in their countries and refuse to live an European way of life and bring with themselves their original customs and culture. Morocco and Algeria, the two dominant countries in North Africa besides Egypt may be a good example if a closer look is taken of them. It is a traditional fact, that while in the Cold War the Algerians were in friendship with the Soviet Union, which remained after it resolved, the Moroccans were in league with the US and France. This provides facts about their possible future approach or attitude towards the migration question. The issue affects both countries, since they lie in the path of the migration routes that come from the Sahel to Europe, and thus they have responsibility in handling the situation.

They are also the source of migration to the continent, and this way they have a two-sided responsibility in this phenomenon. Firstly, they should restrict more their citizens not to migrate to foreign countries without their consent, secondly, they ought to obstruct more the migration caravans flowing in from the Sahel through them. However, they are in difficult position, since the migration issue is not very easy to be handled in a third world country, where the state security is not so tight as in Europe. Nevertheless, Morocco concentrates maybe more – because of political closeness to the EU – on the restriction of migrants, however, in July 2022, several immigrants attacked the two Spanish enclaves in the country, Ceuta and Melilla, in which 23 people were killed and a serious scandal swept through the news. However, Morocco – since the middle of the 2010s – tries to restrict its migration flows to Europe, thus it tries to cooperate with the European authorities. Algeria on the other hand is another case, because it traditionally has ties with Russia and the East, so it is not so inclined to support Europe's migration policies and demands. Nevertheless, it also tries to cooperate – as much as its political affiliations permit – with Europe and help its migration-related problems. In all, the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has provided a food problem in the region, which will definitely hinder the possibilities of a controlled migration to Europe (Ouhemmou, 2023). Thus, migration is also a factor that can seriously obstruct the continuous flow of gas and petrol from Africa to Europe and this way it restricts its aspiration to wean off from Russian gas.

The Role of Tunisia in the Gas Debate and the Regional Security Situation

Tunisia is also an important party of the North African security environment and plays an important part in the debate concerning the gas transition. Tunisia has relatively good relations with Algeria, and since the Arab Spring in 2010/11 it has been truly concerned of the security of the country. Because of the porous borders between the two states, there was always the issue of smugglers and terrorist networks that hindered the development of Tunisia and Algeria as well. There is not only this phenomenon, but also the issue of migration and weapon-smuggling activities that bewilder the relationship of the two countries. Tunisia also takes part in the gas transit between North Africa and Europe through the Transmed gas pipeline, which runs from Algeria through Tunisia to Italy. Thus, the country is also important in the gas debate and in reinforcing Europe's position in contrary to Russia. Tunisia this way is also a relevant factor in the creation of new resources for Europe in connection with gas supplies (Henneberg, 2023).

LNG-Transport as a New Source for Europe's Gas Supply

Africa – especially North Africa – has got not only pipelines constructed for gas transition, but LNG-terminals as well, which are important in the gas-trade too. The LNG-capabilities cannot be emitted from the resources that are present on the northern part of the continent, since they present a significant amount of gas supplies that could be transported for European use. Africa is rich in mineral resources, and gas and petrol are outstanding among them as indeed they take part in the international trade. There are approximately three countries that could be major providers of these materials: Mozambique, Nigeria and Tanzania, notwithstanding Algeria, which already transports a serious amount of gas to Europe. However, the business world is never so simple, as the countries which own the gas resources have also domestic problems: internal demand is also high, they have to think about their people as well before they can turn to export. Nevertheless, Europe is in desperate need of extra petrol and gas supply and this way it is expected that despite of the domestic want, the aforementioned countries will be able to manage to find a way to squeeze out some amount for the export and the European partners as well.

There is also the problem of the renewable energy sources which will be a serious issue on the European markets, as the continent not only wants to get rid of Russian gas deals but also would like to change its energy supplies into renewable sources. This will be a difficult issue, nevertheless the African countries will have to look forward to meeting these standards as the traditional source of gas may not be enough or may be changed in the near future concerning the European states (the issue of renewables will be discussed later in this article, since it pertains to the energy deals between the two



continents). However, at this point, besides Algeria, Egypt and Senegal are capable of providing LNG-supporting ports that are able to transport LNG-gas to Europe. It can also be mentioned, that the LNG-transport is already ongoing, although not in the expected measure yet: Algeria transports to France and Turkey while Nigeria supplies Spain, France and Portugal. Thus it cannot be denied that some of the LNG-transport has started to flow. It is interesting as well that there are designed LNG-ports to be built in the future in Mozambique and Tanzania (Global Energy Monitor, 2022).

The Issue of Renewables in the Energy Transport between Africa and Europe

As it is known, Europe is in transition, and it would like to change its energy resources as much as possible into renewables. Africa of course knows this, and besides the issue of gas pipelines and LNG transition, it is important to say some words about the renewable energy aspirations of the continent to satisfy not only their European counterparts, but themselves as well.

To take into consideration, Morocco is one of the best examples, since it has no traditional energy resources (unless the Trans-Saharan Gas Pipeline hits in). The country realised this and thinks ahead of the future. The most important renewable energy sources are electricity (windmills), solar panels and green energy. Morocco – being almost the only North Africa country without gas resources – tries to concentrate its industry on these kinds of energy resources. They are expensive, of course, but the country has to think about its future and its export tendencies to grow with Europe. With its vast areas of the Sahara and its 300 sunny days per year it is an ideal country to boost these abovementioned resources, and supply Europe with them. Not only would it be a great deal for the country, but also it could put Morocco ahead of Algeria in their race of who becomes the leader of North Africa. Thus, the issue is far from irrelevant to the country and this way it tries to improve its capabilities in this area (Cobo, 2023).

Algeria is in a different position, since it has a load of traditional energy supplies (gas mainly). It is thus not in need of a fast transition, but if it wants to follow future trends and accustom itself to the European acceptations, it should try as well to diversify its energy resources. Algeria – as it has been said – is traditionally a partner of Russia, but it can be a business associate of Europe as well – nothing is against that. This way, Algeria could overcome its disagreements with European countries and with their help it could improve its renewables capabilities, however, it is rather less enthusiastic in developing this field of expertise compared to Morocco, which is in desperate need of finding new energy sources in lack of petrol and gas supplies. By all means, Algeria could boost its energy supplies even more with concentrating on the improvement of renewable energy elements (Farrand, 2022).

Altogether, it can be said that besides traditional energy resources such as gas and petrol, North African countries should concentrate on developing renewable energy supplies, since Europe is trying to change its energy factors in some decades, and it is better if Africa is prepared for that since the export between the two regions will continue and the energy transition will not stop between them.

China's Role in the Energy and Security Situation in North Africa

At the end of the article, it is perhaps relevant to say some words about the role of China in this complex and difficult issue of energy and security in North Africa, which has of course effects *vica-versa* in the European-North African relationship and the Russian-Ukrainian war as well.

Since Morocco was a traditional ally of the West (US and France), whereas Algeria was rather a partner of the Soviet Union/now Russia, there is a natural animosity, which presents itself in several other issues between the two regional superpowers. In the recent years, Algeria had to align itself a little further from Russia due to pressure from its European partners. Perhaps the approach to China is the sign of this phenomenon.

As it was said, in the last years, Algeria opened not only to the European trade markets, but to the Chinese business partner as well, who are always diplomatic and have no expectations diplomatically and concerning human rights as the Europeans do. One of the main reasons besides the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, that turned Algeria towards China is perhaps the increasing support of the United States for Morocco, and its recognition of Israel, and first of all, the recognition of the country's demand for Western Sahara by the US. All these factors – albeit the energy deals with Europe – pushed Algeria further and further politically from the West and America and it went straight into the arms of Russia and China.

China is also recognized by its cunning diplomacy, which concentrates on business deals, money, instead of acting militarily, and avoids the interventions into other cultures. This was attractive for Algeria, who renewed its waning relations with the eastern power, and struck a series of business and energy deals also with the country. China's role in North Africa supporting Algeria could also mean that by the support of the sinoese country, the North African entity could grow to surpass Morocco in their race to regional superstatus. Another issue is that this relation would help is the long-standing aspiration of the North African country to be part of the BRICS countries and become an international factor and thus have a word in world politics as well.

However, this is far from the reality yet, and Algeria has a lot to work if it wants to overtake Morocco's role as regional leading power in North Africa and become a country to be counted with internationally. The intention to become a BRICS-member



this way also empowers Algeria to strengthen its relations with the Chinese as well (Zoubir, 2022).

Conclusion

To assess everything that has been said is difficult, because there are so many factors that on the one hand hinder and on the other support the energy relations between North Africa and Europe. It can be concluded that the Russian-Ukrainian conflict has generated a situation in which Europe had to turn to the North African continent primarily to attract more sources of firstly traditional sources of gas and petrol and secondly renewable energy resources, which both can help the continent turn to new sources of energy that help them to wean off from the Russian-dependence. This is not an easy issue as before the European continent got most of its energy supplies from the eastern power. Since the war started, however, North Africa came handy and they started to turn to the southern continent as the new business deals show. However, there are several political and security issues that hindered the by the way blossoming relationship between the two sides.

First of all, the traditional Algerian-Moroccan rivalry over Western Sahara and other issues made it more difficult to come to a common understanding with Europe, and it didn't always help the continent in receiving alternative sources of energy supplies. However, there are other factors, that also obstruct the North Africans to struck deals with the Europeans: terrorism is for example thriving in these areas, and the several radical organizations and fundamentalist thinking lessened the possibility of a possible cooperation. Migration is also an issue, which makes it difficult to work together, because it causes political turmoil and regional instability that doesn't help in these deals. The role of superpowers like the USA, Russia and China also makes it difficult to navigate between the waves of political games in the region. Tunisia is also a country that has a say in the debate, so it gets more and more complicated.

The renewable energy resources also count as a new factor, since Europe is in transition and looking for these as well and African countries have to take this into consideration if they want to maintain their commercial relations with Europe in the future. Altogether, it can be said that the issue is a very complex one and all partners should take everything in consideration if they want to move forward in the business deals they want to make with each others. There are a lot of interests that collide in this race for energy and it is a very interesting issue, who will be the winner in this international debate. All party members should take into consideration, that if they want to stand out in their region and internationally, they have to maneuver carefully and cleverly to achieve what they want.

Conflict of Interest

The authors hereby declare that they have no financial interest in this manuscript.

Notes on Contributor

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