

The Moroccan Perception of The European Union

A qualitative Minor Field Study based on
Moroccan university students

Isabelle Lloyd-Pugh

Abstract

The research area of this field study is external perceptions of the EU. Morocco is the specific target field and the material is gathered from semi-structured interviews with Moroccan university students. The aim has been to identify prevailing perceptions of the EU in accordance with role theory and in comparison with previous research.

There are important political and economic ties between Morocco and the EU. The European Commission and other decision makers are increasingly interested in how the EU is perceived externally, not the least in North Africa after the Arab Spring, which is why this study is of particular relevance.

This study has shown that the EU is mainly perceived in positive terms in Morocco, and believed to have something valuable to contribute. It is strongly considered to have the role of an economic power and as the most important counterpart at present. However, the EU is not seen as a normative power or as a postcolonial power, but it is considered to have some postcolonial tendencies. The EU is mainly only perceived credible in some aspects or credible if it benefits the EU itself. The Moroccan perception differs from previous research within the field.

Key words: External perceptions of the EU, Morocco, Morocco-EU relations, role theory, postcolonialism.

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1 Introduction

1.1 Background

One of Morocco's most important assets is its geographical position; located between Europe and the rest of Africa, generating both challenges and opportunities. Since Morocco is only 14 kilometres from Spain, Europe has been a constant natural influence to Morocco, and reciprocally. There are also strong historical links between Morocco and Europe, such as the French and Spanish colonisation in Morocco during the past century (Pennell, 2003).

Morocco has further links to Europe and to the European Union in particular. Morocco is for instance the biggest financial receiver within the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP). In 2008, Morocco became the first country to obtain the Advanced Status, which is a privilege relation by the EU given to Morocco for their political and economic cooperation (EEAS 2, 2015).

External perception of the EU is an established research field; however, it is still worth developing. The study of external perception contributes to important awareness of the EU's work that is helpful for both internal and external actors. Previous research on the EU's external perceptions has often been based on public opinion or external elites (Lucarelli, 2013, p. 1-2). University students in Morocco are part of both mentioned targets groups, which is why it is suitable to base a study on external perceptions of the EU in Morocco on them.

1.2 Problem formulation and research questions

Despite the geographical and historical proximity between Morocco and Europe, and although Morocco is the biggest financial receiver within the European Neighbourhood Policy as well as the first country obtaining the Advanced Status, there is very little previous research on the external perception of the EU that includes Morocco. This study is an attempt to start filling in the missing gap of the perception of the EU's external policy roles in North Africa.

The following research questions will function as guidelines throughout the study:

- *What type of power role(s) do Moroccan students perceive the EU to play?*

- *How is the EU's presence in Morocco perceived?*
- *How is the EU evaluated: in a positive, neutral or negative way?*
- *How does the perception of the EU by Moroccan university students correspond to previous research?*

1.3 Aim and purpose of the study

The aim of this study is to investigate how university students in Morocco perceive the EU's external policy roles and to what extent this corresponds to existing literature. The ambition is to complete previous research on external perceptions and to contribute to the discussion regarding the global view of the EU. This study is complementary since it is based on Morocco, which as previously mentioned is located in a relatively overlooked geographical region. The study also gives a complementary picture in the sense that it is based on students' perceptions of the EU, which differs slightly from previous research.

This study is highly of relevance since the European Commission and other decision makers are very interested in the perception of their actions and presence in neighbouring countries, not the least in North Africa after the Arab Spring. The Commission and the European External Action Service (EEAS) want to refine the EU's public diplomacy in key areas, including Maghreb (personal information from Professor Ole Elgström). Empirically identifying the perception of the EU in Morocco amongst university students is also of significance since this gives a probable hint of direction of the actual outcome of the Morocco-EU relations in the future as this specific target group most likely will be amongst the decision makers of tomorrow.

1.4 Anatomy of the study

The following section explains the methodology of the study such as delimitations and justifications, as well as the procedure of it.

Thereafter, the concept of role theory and the external perception of the EU are further explained. The EU as a super power, an economic power, a normative power, and a postcolonial power are four roles that will be defined as well as related to previous research on external perceptions. Previous evaluations of the EU will also be described as well as existing research in Morocco.

Important contextual information is then given. In section four, a brief historical, political, economic and social introduction to Morocco is explained. Section five is an attempt to summarise the EU's overarching official goals in Morocco as well as to give an account of the bilateral EU-Moroccan relationship and the primary agreements that frame it.

In section six, the results from interviews with the Moroccan students are shown after have been transcribed, translated and put together.

This study would not be complete without section eight and nine, where the conclusion followed by a shorter discussion is given.

2 Methodological foundation

Previous studies on external perceptions of the EU have been based on public opinion, external elites, and on the media. Data has been gathered through surveys as well as interviews, using different quantitative and qualitative methods (Lucarelli, 2013, p. 1-2). Naturally, all methodological choices have different strengths and weaknesses.

This study classifies as a qualitative field study (Esaission et al., 2007, p.121). This is a suitable method when wanting to gain understanding of underlying opinions or perceptions (Teorell & Svensson, 2007, p. 264-265). It is based on students and the data was gathered through semi-structured interviews. The following section will describe the procedure of the study as well as justifying the methodological choices behind it.

2.1 Delimitations and justifications

When it comes to investigating Moroccan perceptions of the EU, delimitations are strictly needed. The Moroccan population is an extremely diverse group, meaning that it would be an impossible task to generalise one representative perception of the EU. Morocco has important social contrasts and educational differences: 42.4% of women and 23.9% of the men are illiterate (CIA, 2015). Since the knowledge of the EU seems to be correlated with the level of education (Lucarelli, 2013, p.7), it is of relevance for this study to focus on the educational elite in order to obtain well-informed opinions and perceptions of the EU.

Students are a suitable target group since they are both part of the public opinion and the elite, which are well-established target groups in previous research within the field (Chaban & Holland, 2015, p.10). Students are also suitable since they are relatively accessible and because of their French language competence, which naturally facilitates the interviews.

The selection of students is based on the principle of maximum variation (Esaission et al., 2007, p. 116-117) when it comes to gender and academic level: half of the students are female and half are male; half are bachelor students and half are master students. All students were born and raised by Moroccan parents and they have undertaken their education in Morocco. Half of the students interviewed study at *École de Gouvernance et d'Économie* in Rabat, and half study at *Al Akhawayn University* in Ifrane. These schools were chosen since they are the highest ranked and most prestigious universities of Morocco to assure interviews with the elite. Eight of sixteen students study political science while the rest economics. These are suitable academic disciplines in order to get well-

informed opinions on the EU, which is of importance for the relevance of the study.

It should be stressed that the chosen target group is by no means representative for the youth of the country. Nevertheless, the perception of the EU amongst this specific target group is highly suitable as they are most likely will be part of the leading elite of the Morocco in the future. Empirically identifying their perceptions of the EU is of relevance since it gives a probable hint of direction of the actual outcome of the Morocco-EU relations in the future.

2.2 Semi-structured interviews

The interviews are semi-structured, which is a popular and well-establish method when studying external perceptions (Lucarelli, 2013, p.3).

Semi-structured interviews imply that a set of open questions are prepared as a basis for the interview, and depending on the situation certain questions can be excluded, altered or added during the interview. This interview-method permits systematic comparison at the same time as it leaves space for spontaneous developments in the course of the interviews (May, 2013, p.163). The mix of pre-conceived questions and improvised questions often lead to a more relaxed and freely spoken dialogue. The advantage with interviews compared to surveys is that there is a possibility to clarify the questions as well as the answers if needed. In addition, the answers can be better interpreted thanks to body language and the tone of voice etc. (Teorell & Svensson, 2007, p.90-91).

2.3 Procedure

During the two-month stay in Morocco, between May and July 2015, sixteen interviews with students were conducted. The interviews were done individually so that the person interviewed had the possibility to speak honestly without any outside influence. The eleven questions were not sent to the students in advance to avoid them preparing for the interview. Each interview took between 30 and 45 minutes; depending on how talkative and interested each student was. Ten interviews were conducted in French whilst six were in English, depending on the students' own preferences. Fourteen out of sixteen interviews were recorded, whilst the two remaining were documented by taking notes. The recordings enabled attentive and more relaxed interviews as well as possibilities to double-check the answers. Both universities helped with the initial contact with students, but thereafter a so-called "snowball technique" was mainly used (Esaiasson et al., 2007, p. 286) since interviewed students would inform other students about the possibility to participate. All interviews were later transcribed and the interviews conducted in French were translated into English. In the results, the response

options to each question were given after the interviews had been conducted depending on the answers of the students. This is a useful methodological choice since it leaves the field open to unexpected and nuanced answers (Teorell & Svensson, 2007, p.90). In the analysis, the results were applied on the theoretical framework, which is based on previous research. The result of every question was therefore compared to what existing literature has previously found on external perceptions regarding the EU, and similarities as well as differences were pointed out.

3 Theoretical framework and existing research

The theoretical framework in this study is based on role theory. Four specific roles are used in this study: the EU as a super power, the EU as an economic power, the EU as a normative power, and the EU as a postcolonial power. The three firstly mentioned roles have been chosen since they are the major identified roles in previous research. The EU as a postcolonial power adds a somewhat new dimension to the existing literature.

Role theory and the external perceptions of the EU will be further explained below. Thereafter, the four roles will be presented by giving an account of previously identified external perceptions within each role. Finally, an account of the evaluations of the EU as well as existing research on Moroccan perceptions of the EU will be given.

3.1 Role theory and external perceptions of the EU

Role theory is often used when analysing the EU's international involvement. This is a suitable theoretical framework since it helps map out, categorise and contextualise perceptions (personal information from Professor Ole Elgström).

Role theory emerged in foreign policy literature when scholars such as Holsti (1970) started to discover regular behavioural patterns of states. According to theorists, the role that an actor engages in is an interactive process determined both by the actor's self-perception and the role prescriptions of others (Harnisch et al., 2011, p.9). Moreover, roles refer to patterns of expected or appropriate behaviour, which is why actors behave in the way they believe is expected from them in a particular situation or context (Elgström & Smith, 2006, p.5-6).

External perception is an integrated part of role theory. According to Lucarelli (2013, p. 1-2, 11) there are five main reasons for why research on the external perception of the EU is worth developing. Firstly, it challenges both the EU's own self-representation and the academic literature. Secondly, these images have a possible impact on the EU's identity given. Thirdly, it gives a broader understanding of the EU's role in the world. Fourthly, it can contribute to an understanding of the conditions in order for the EU's policies to be effective. Finally, it completes the strong Eurocentrism of the literature on the EU.

3.2 The EU as a super power

There is great regional and issue-specific variation when it comes to the perception of the EU having a role as a super power. In the Pacific region, this image is highly present, whilst in Africa and in Southeast Asia, the EU is most commonly considered only to be a super power in certain aspects (Chaban et al., 2013, p. 443-444). Countries that are major recipients of EU aid tend to view the EU as a super power (Elgström & Chaban, 2015, p.22). However, the EU is in many parts of the world seen as less important than the USA and increasingly overshadowed by China (Lucarelli, 2013, p.7-8). One common reason to why the EU is not considered to have the role as a super power is its perceived lack of unity. Existing literature has also pointed out the fact that the EU is perceived being a super power in many different aspects; the EU is for example seen as a super power economically, diplomatically, normatively, and military and so on (Chaban et al., 2013, p. 444-446).

3.3 The EU as an economic power

The role of the EU as an economic power refers to the EU's ability in trade, business, investments, and to impose and control import/export regulations. This is the overall predominant perception in previous research on the EU's external perceptions, both amongst the external elite and the public opinion, and in various parts of the world (Lucarelli, 2013, p.7-9). The EU is seen as a trade giant, a huge market and a source of direct foreign investment and the image of the EU as an economic power seems to be surviving the economic crisis (Chaban & Magdalina, 2014, p. 197).

However, the perception of the EU as an economic power terms is not always positive, especially not in Africa where the EU sometimes is seen as an unequal counterpart that keeps Africa in a subordinate position (Chaban et al., 2013, p. 442).

3.4 The EU as a normative power

The basic idea of the EU as a normative power is based on the ability to shape others' perceptions of what is considered as "normal" or "good". Key EU norms that the EU aims to export to other countries are: peace, freedom, liberty, democracy, human rights, rule of law, equality, social solidarity, anti-discrimination, sustainable development, and good governance (Manners, 2002, p. 243).

Some research has shown that there is not much evidence of the EU being widely seen as a “normative power”. According to Chaban et al. (2013, p.444), the EU as a normative power is in the Pacific region a non-existing perception and in Africa this perception is very moderate, even though in Southeast Asia, the EU is considered to be somewhat of a normative power.

The reason why the EU is not perceived of having a normative role has got to do with the EU not being understood of having a special role in the normative field. Moreover, the EU’s promotions of norms are not viewed as credible since they are perceived as a way to reintroduce postcolonial control, or to spread Eurocentric norms rather than universal norms (Larsen, 2014, p. 905-906).

Nevertheless, together with a few individual countries in the world, the perception of the EU as a normative power is more prominent in the neighbouring countries to the EU. Amongst the eastern neighbours, the EU is seen as having contributed in developing democracy, and human rights are viewed as an important area of cooperation (Bengtsson & Elgström, 2012, p. 99).

3.5 The EU as a postcolonial power

Previous research has stated that there is a view of the EU as an actor with postcolonial aspirations using similar approaches as during the colonial era. The EU has been criticised of using rather patronising methods, using one-way communication and taking on a civilising role. The EU is watching, guiding and caring if you obey, but at the same time punishing and even threatening if you do not. In countries with a colonial past this contributes to reinforcing the perception of the EU as a postcolonial power. In addition, the EU has been criticised of having a Eurocentric view since conditions on democratic reforms and good governance are strictly being based on Eurocentric values without taking into account the characteristics of the region (Elgström & Chaban, 2015, p.29).

Existing literature has stressed that it is of importance to look into how present-day EU perceptions and roles came to life and to adopt a longer-term, historical perspective (Chaban & Holland, 2015, p.24). According to Lucarelli (2013, p.12) the relation between current images of Europe and the EU, and those historically shaped, should be better explored.

3.6 Evaluations of the EU

Generally speaking, there are positive perceptions of the EU when it comes to general global impact, economic/trade, and diplomacy/politics. The EU is also perceived positively when it comes to the fight against climate change and to the adoption of international agreements based on the rule of law. Interviews with the

elite have in general shown a stronger appreciation of the EU's power than public opinion (Lucarelli, 2013, p.8-9).

Negative perception of the EU is that it sometimes is considered an imposing model that uses a patronising negotiating style, which implies not listening to the concerns of the developing countries. Moreover, developing countries sometimes perceive the EU rhetoric as "empty words". It is also noticed that Islamic states are aware of negative attitudes towards Muslims in Europe (Elgström & Chaban, 2015, p.24). In the Pacific region, the negative perceptions of the EU are that it is not visible or vociferous in the region. In Africa, the negative perceptions of the EU are that there are internal divisions and that the Union is a follower of the United States. In Southeast Asia, a negative perception of the EU is that there are internal divisions (Chaban et al., 2013, p. 443).

Previous research has shown that there is an overall lack of knowledge of the EU in non-European countries, and it is regarded as complicated and bureaucratic. In general, the knowledge seems to be positively correlated with the level of education and the geographical/historical proximity to Europe, such as in the case of colonial countries. There is also considered to be an overall lack of communication and information about the EU (Chaban et al., 2013, p. 448).

3.7 Existing research on the Moroccan perception

There is very little previous research on the Moroccan perception of the EU. Nevertheless, the EU has kept some statistics on how the Union is perceived by its neighbouring countries including Morocco, which hereby will be presented.

75% of Moroccans consider the EU as an important counterpart. The most important areas of cooperation with the EU in chronological order are considered being: trade, peace and security, employment, human rights, and tackling poverty. The fields within which that the EU should play a bigger role in Morocco in chronological order are: commerce, economic development, migration, education, foreign affairs, transport, human rights, culture, equality between men and women 81% consider that the EU helps the promotion of democracy and 71% think that the EU can help bring peace and stability to the country (ENB 2, 2014, p. 43, 50).

79% of Moroccans perceive the EU positively and 75% say that they tend to trust the EU. These perceptions are the best amongst the neighbouring countries of the EU (ENB 1, 2014, p. 32, 48). Positive associations of the EU in Morocco are: reliable, calm, strong/powerful, honest, flexible, loyal, ambitious and intelligent. However, 76% think that by helping Morocco the EU is ensuring its own prosperity (ENIC, 2015).

In Morocco, 79% think that the EU has the appropriate level of involvement in the country. 62% think that there is enough information about the EU in the country and 56% consider the communication of the EU's presence in Morocco is easy to understand (ENB 2, 2014, p. 54).

4 Morocco: A brief introduction

4.1 Historical context

Morocco has a rich and ancient history and an identity that by far predates colonial rule. Islam made its entrance to the region in the final decades of the 7th century and Morocco has had a monarchy for centuries (Pennell, 2003, p.19).

Morocco was under French control between 1912 and 1956. During colonisation, France made major political and economic reforms in Morocco, although these were accused to primarily benefit the French and the Moroccan elite. The northern territories of Morocco as well as Western Sahara were under Spanish protectorate. Western Sahara belonged to Spain until 1975 when it was chaotically taken over by Morocco, which led to war. The war calmed down when Morocco agreed that a referendum concerning independence for Western Sahara was to be held but until today it has not been held (Pennell, 2003, p.138-162).

After Morocco's independence, King Mohammed V was in power until 1961. His son, Hassan II, thereafter became Morocco's regent until 1999. Hassan II's was authoritarian and conservative and his leadership laid the foundation for modern day Morocco (Hansen & Jensen, 2012, p.177-178).

4.2 Political context

Since 1999, the King of Morocco is Mohammed VI. The present king is considered to be more modern, liberal and democratic than his father was (Hansen & Jensen, 2012, p.178).

Morocco is the only African state that is not a member of the African Union (AU) since they still occupy Western Sahara. The Western Sahara conflict is the main reason for an infected relationship with neighbouring country Algeria, and this issue still permeates Morocco's foreign affairs. However, Morocco's relationship with the USA has become stronger since 9/11, and there is cooperation with the USA and the EU to combat Morocco's three main security issues: illegal immigration, terrorism and drug trafficking (Lund, 2007, p.3).

Since independence in 1956, Morocco is a constitutional monarchy with a multiparty system, but the political parties have highly restricted power. A major reason why not Morocco never really was part of the Arab Spring in 2011 is that the King Mohammed VI early acted to the spread of pro-democracy protests. A

reform programme was rapidly implemented that included a new constitution implying more power to the parliament and to the ministers. However, the ultimate authority remains in the hand of the monarch, and the political situation in Morocco can be described as something between cosmetic reforms and a real democratisation, which is why Morocco according to Freedom House (2015) is classified as partly free. On the whole, Morocco is despite its challenges a relatively stable country in an unstable region (Khan & Mezran, 2015, p.178-181).

4.3 Economic context

Morocco has suffered from typical postcolonial economic problems. Trade and production is still very focused on the former colonisers, the biggest export partners being France (20.9%) and Spain (19.9%). As a consequence, the economic difficulties in Europe contributed to an economic slowdown in 2012 in Morocco like many of its neighbouring countries.

However, Morocco's economy is comparatively well integrated in the world market where key sectors are agriculture, tourism, phosphates and textiles. Since Mohammed VI came into power Morocco has had a relatively stable economy market with an overall steady growth, low inflation, and gradually declining unemployment. In February 2011, also as a response to the Arab Spring in the neighbouring countries, the King and his government quickly drew up an economic plan with the support of the International Monetary Fund to improve the public finances and contain inflation (Khan & Mezran, 2015, p.1).

4.4 Social context

Morocco is a diverse melting pot of cultures, ethnicities and religions, which makes the country demographically unique.

Morocco is an Arabic country that together with Algeria and Tunisia is part of the Maghreb. Nevertheless, a big part of Morocco's identity is Berber, who is the indigenous people. Approximately 40% of the Moroccan population speak some sort of Berber language (Pennell, 2003, p.25).

The postcolonial heritage is highly present in Morocco. French is often the language of business, government and diplomacy. Moreover, French culture permeates Moroccan society, not the least socially, and gives Morocco a constant link to Europe (Lund, 2007, p.4).

99% of the Moroccan population is Sunni-Muslim and Islam plays a central role in society. Even though Morocco today is religiously very heterogenic, Jewish Moroccans are an example of a religious minority that previously has been an important and influential community.

Morocco is also diverse in the sense that it is defined by a variety of contrasts, where the biggest is perhaps socio-economically. Poverty amongst many of Morocco's inhabitants is inevitably present, at the same time extreme wealth amongst others. Another obvious contrast is the antagonism between modernity and traditionalism as well as the distinctive difference between theory and practice, e.g. Islam or the law may officially say one thing while in reality something completely different is going on (Pennell, 2003, p.1).

Moreover, Morocco is a strongly patriarchal society with significant differences between women and men. A gender unjustness that can be proven statistically is the fact that 42.4% of the women are illiterate whilst only 23.9% of the men are, which is a lot higher illiteracy rate than in neighbouring countries (CIA, 2015).

5 Morocco-EU relations

Morocco has strong ties with the EU, and reciprocally. 1987, the former King Hassan II applied to join the EU. Naturally, the application was rejected since Morocco was not considered to be a European country. In later years, there has been hope that the EU would be an economic and political possibility for change in the region. The Maghreb has become increasingly important for the EU, not the least within security policy where the fear of terrorism, Islamic fundamentalism, illegal immigration and drug trafficking are central aspects (Lund, 2007, p. 2).

There are also strong economic ties. Morocco is the neighbouring country that benefits most from the EU's financial support. Moreover, the EU makes up to 70% of all direct foreign investment in Morocco and 55% of Morocco's export goes to the EU. Morocco is also one of the countries with which the EU has signed free trade agreements. However, the financial contribution that goes to the Moroccan national budget is a relatively small share compared to other African countries (EU Delegation, 2015).

Nevertheless, it should not be denied that the Morocco-EU relations are somewhat complex. North Africa has traditionally been a source of cheap working force for the member states of the EU and the EU has been criticised for being unwilling to challenge the current order in North Africa for fear of what political and economic instability might imply (Lund, 2007, p. 4).

5.1 The EU's official goals in Morocco

The EU-Moroccan relations take place on many levels: between the EU and the Moroccan government, between the EU and non-state actors in Morocco, as well as between the EU and regional actors of Morocco. The EU implements its ambitions through supporting reforms and budgets, supporting institutions with expertise and assistance, by facilitating investments as well as loans, and by giving grants to the civil society (EC 2, 2015).

The overall objective for the EU in Morocco is to promote good governance, the rule of law and human rights as well as to support economic and social development. There are three official priority areas of the EU when it comes to their presence in Morocco. The first area is the equitable access to basic social services such as healthcare, education, social protection, and the development of rural areas. The second area is democratic governance and the rule of law, i.e. justice, migration and public governance. The final area is employment and sustainable growth (EC 1, 2015).

5.2 Agreements between the EU and Morocco

The EU-Moroccan relations are mainly determined by the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) and by the Advanced Status. This relationship is structured and permanent and is materialised in an Action Plan (EU Delegation, 2015). These three pillars of cooperation will be further explained in the following sections.

5.2.1 The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP)

The European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) is a key part of the EU's foreign policy. It was launched in 2003 with the objective to strengthen the prosperity, stability and security for the EU and its neighbouring countries. Together with the 28 member states of the EU, there are 16 neighbouring countries that are part of this agreement within which Morocco is the largest financial recipient (EEAS 1, 2015).

The ENP is a primarily a bilateral policy between the EU and each partner country; however, it is further enriched and complemented by regional and multilateral co-operation initiatives. The ENP works for example with economic integration and access to EU markets, facilitation of travel to the EU, technical and policy support as well as support to civil society (EC 2, 2015).

The ENP is based on the values of democracy, rule of law, good governance, respect of human rights, market economy principals and sustainable development. The level of ambition of the relationship with every partner country depends on the extent to which these values are shared (EEAS 1, 2015).

5.2.2 The Advanced Status

In 2008, Morocco became the first country to obtain the Advanced Status. It was given to Morocco during the French presidency of the EU (France Diplomatie, 2015). The Advanced Status is a privileged relation with the EU. Even though Morocco most probably will never become a member state of the EU, the Advanced Status gives Morocco advantages and a closer cooperation with the EU that most other neighbouring countries do not have. It was given to Morocco for their willingness to strengthen political dialogue, and for cooperating in economic, social, parliamentary, juridical and security fields (EC 1, 2015).

5.2.3 Action Plan

Within the ENP, there are action plans for each partner country. These action plans set out the partner country's agenda for political and economic reforms,

with a period of time from 3 to 5 years. They are meant to reflect the country's needs and capacities, as well as the interests of the EU (EEAS 2, 2015).

In Morocco's case, there is an action plan valid between 2013 and 2017 and aims to implement the Advanced Status. The action plan is an instrument on how to concretely implement the EU's political, economic, social and human objectives in Morocco (EU Delegation, 2015).

6 Results

A total of sixteen students were interviewed in this study, which can be seen below. The justification of the selection of students and the course of action can be seen in the methodology.

	University	Academic discipline	Sex	Level
Student 1	EGE	Political Science	Female	Bachelor
Student 2	EGE	Political Science	Female	Master
Student 3	EGE	Political Science	Male	Bachelor
Student 4	EGE	Political Science	Male	Master
Student 5	EGE	Economics	Female	Bachelor
Student 6	EGE	Economics	Female	Master
Student 7	EGE	Economics	Male	Bachelor
Student 8	EGE	Economics	Male	Master
Student 9	AUI	Political Science	Female	Bachelor
Student 10	AUI	Political Science	Female	Master
Student 11	AUI	Political Science	Male	Bachelor
Student 12	AUI	Political Science	Male	Master
Student 13	AUI	Economics	Female	Bachelor
Student 14	AUI	Economics	Female	Master
Student 15	AUI	Economics	Male	Bachelor
Student 16	AUI	Economics	Male	Master

The answers from the students will now be presented below. Two of the most commonly answered alternatives to every question have been exemplified with citations that are representative for the group of students giving the same answer. All students have been cited at least once.

1.) What do you associate with Europe?

The number under each notion stands for how many times a student mentioned it, i.e. three students spoke about the unification when confronted with this question whilst only one mentioned individualism.

Americanisation	Bureaucracy	Colonialism	Consensus
1	1	6	1
Democracy	Development	Diversity	Financial Crisis
3	2	5	3
History & Culture	Human Rights	Individualism	Lack of Unification
3	2	1	1
Moralising	Old Population	Racism/Islamophobia	Minority Rights
3	1	4	1
Role Model	Sacralisation	Strong Economy	The EU
1	1	2	4
Tourism	Unification	Welfare System	Well Organised
3	3	2	2
Westernisation	Women's Rights		
2	1		

The students associated many different and sometimes contradictory terms and phenomenon with Europe. Most commonly was “Colonialism” since six out of the sixteen students mentioned this. Five students mentioned “Diversity”, and four of them “Racism/Islamophobia” as well as “The EU”.

“The first thing that comes in mind is the colonisation. I also think of westernisation, i.e. how Europeans in general perceive Morocco, the Maghreb and Africa. I have got the impression that Europeans have a negative and false impression of Morocco and that they want to impose certain things without really respecting our culture.” – Student 9.

“I think of the EU. In Morocco we have difficulties separating the EU from Europe, since most of the countries that we know in Europe are part of the EU.” – Student 5.

2.) Do you consider yourself well informed about the EU?

Yes	Relatively well	Not fully informed	No
4	8	3	1

Half of the students answered that they are relatively well informed. Four students considered themselves being well informed about the EU. Three considered themselves not being fully informed, and only one student answered “No”.

Relatively well: *“I believe that my knowledge is a lot better than most Moroccans since many of them would not know the difference between the EU and France.” – Student 2.*

Not fully informed: *“I would say that you are never fully informed about the EU. The more you look into the EU, the more you will find.” – Student 1.*

3.) What values and norms do you associate the EU with?

Animal's Rights	Capitalism	Children's Rights	Colonialism
1	2	2	1
Consensus	Corporatism	Democracy	Diversity
1	1	6	2
Economic Cooperation	Enlargement	Extremism	Freedom of Speech
1	1	2	2
Gay Rights	Human Rights	Hypocrisy	Immigration Issues
1	9	1	2

Individualism	Liberty	Pluralism	Political Cooperation
1	4	2	1
Property Rights	Racism	Religious Freedom	Respect for Minorities
1	2	1	1
Shared Values	Strong Economy	Transparency	Unification
1	3	1	6
Welfare System	Women's Rights		
1	4		

The values and norms that were most commonly associated with the EU were “Human Rights”, since nine students mentioned this. Six students answered “Unification”, and just as many “Democracy”.

“I think of human rights, women’s rights, minority rights and gay rights. I also think of democracy, even though the EU does not apply democracy in all situations, but in most of them.” – Student 10.

“I think of solidarity between the countries, and the unification of 28 different states.” – Student 7.

4.) Can you mention any example of EU-Moroccan cooperation?

Advanced Status	Agriculture	Culture	Economy/Commerce
3	7	3	5
Education	ENP	EU Delegation in Rabat	Fishing
4	1	4	8
Free Movements	Human Rights	Industry	Migration
1	1	3	4
Security	Trade	UfM	Women's Rights
3	4	2	1

Half of the students knew that there is cooperation between the EU and Morocco in connection to fishing rights, which was the most common answer. Almost just

as many students mentioned agricultural cooperation. Only three students mentioned the Advanced Status that Morocco has received from the EU and as little as one student spoke about the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP).

“There are agricultural and fishing agreements, as well as cooperation when it comes to security issues.” – Student 11.

“I know about the EU Delegation in Rabat and that there are a lot of commercial agreements.” – Student 7.

5.) Do you perceive the EU in positive or negative terms?

Positive	Mainly positive	Both positive and negative	Mainly negative
4	5	6	1

The largest group of students perceive the EU in both positive and negative terms. Four students perceive the EU as positive and five as mainly positive. Only one student perceives the EU in mainly negative terms.

Both positive and negative: *“I perceive the EU negatively since I think of the colonial aspect, which has made Morocco lose parts of its culture and history. Also, Muslims in Europe cannot practice their religion the way they might want to. I perceive the EU positively since it is a world power.”* – Student 1.

Mainly positive: *“It is a complex question, but mainly positive, even though there are still inequalities when it comes to Moroccan-EU relations.”* – Student 11.

6.) Do you consider the EU to be a super power?

Yes, of course	Yes	In some aspects	Not really
4	8	3	1

Twelve out of sixteen students answered “Yes, of course” or “Yes” to this question. Three considered the EU as a super power in some aspects, but only one answered not really.

Yes: *“Yes, the EU is diplomatically and economically a super power. However, the EU does not optimise its potential, especially not politically. This is why the EU is a super power but not THE super power.”* – Student 3.

Yes, of course: “Yes, of course, a lot of big countries are part of it such as Germany, France, the UK and the Scandinavian countries.” – Student 15.

7.) Do you mainly consider the EU as a normative power, as an economic power or as a postcolonial power?

Normative	Economic	Postcolonial	Economic and postcolonial	All three
1	11	2	1	1

Eleven out of sixteen students primarily considered the EU as an economic power. Two mainly considered the EU as a postcolonial power. Only one mainly considered the EU as a normative power. One student answered all three, and one considered the EU as an economic power just as much as a postcolonial power.

Economic power: “The EU is primarily an economic power; it does whatever is good for the Union.” – Student 6.

Postcolonial power: “The EU is a postcolonial power since its member states were recently colonisers.” – Student 9.

8.) Do you see the EU’s promises as credible?

Yes	Sometimes	If it benefits the EU	Not really
3	5	7	1

Seven of the students answered that they see the EU’s promises as credible if it benefits the EU. Five of the students said sometimes, three answered “Yes” and one said not really.

If it benefits the EU: “I think the EU actually does what it says it will do, but they will do it in a way that would benefit them more than the country.” – Student 14.

Sometimes: “Morocco profits a lot through the cooperation with the EU. However, when it comes to issues such as the West Sahara question the EU hasn’t done a lot, which proves to show that if the EU doesn’t gain from it, their promises are less credible.” – Student 9.

9.) Do you consider the EU as Morocco’s most important counterpart? (Or is it the USA, France, Spain or any other country?)

Yes	For the time being	Less than before	In some aspects
8	5	2	1

Half of the students answered “Yes” to this question. Five said for the time being, meaning that they see the EU as the most important counterpart today but that it might not be in the future. Two students answered less than before, and only one said in some aspects.

Yes: *“The EU is Morocco’s most important counterpart, because of historical, geographical and linguistic reasons.”* – Student 12.

For the time being: *“It is a fact that the EU is the prime counterpart to Morocco today, but I don’t think it will be in the future. This is why it is a good idea for Morocco to have good diplomatic relations elsewhere too, without losing touch with the EU. Considering the political increase of the extreme right in Europe, Morocco could end up in a bad situation if it is too dependent on Europe.”* – Student 8.

Africa	China	France	Japan	Saudi Arabia
4	5	2	1	2
South America	South Korea	Spain	The Maghreb	The USA
1	1	2	1	2

Other important counterparts that the students mentioned were most commonly China and Africa.

“We need to have better cooperation with the EU but also with other partners in Africa and with other parts of the world. Morocco is doing well now, because we are going to Africa and to South America. China is also becoming more important.” – Student 15.

10.) Do you consider the EU as a legitimate actor that has something valuable to contribute to Morocco?

Yes	If the will comes from Morocco	In some aspects	Not really
10	3	1	2

Ten students considered the EU as a legitimate actor that has something valuable to contribute to Morocco. Three students said yes, but only if the will comes from Morocco. Two answered “Not really” and one said “In some aspects”.

Yes: *“Yes, I think so. If there is a good relationship between the EU and Morocco, it could help Morocco economically speaking and in many other ways.”* – Student 12.

If the will comes from Morocco: *“The EU can help develop Morocco, but the will to change needs to come from the inside and not from the outside.”* – Student 4.

Democracy	Development	Economy/Commerce	Education
2	3	5	5
Employment	Environmental Issues	Freedom of Speech	Human Rights
1	2	1	4
Minority Rights	Politics/Governance	Sacralisation	Tourism
1	3	1	1
Unification of Diversity	Women's Rights		
2	2		

The students had different ideas of what the EU could contribute with, which can be seen in the table above. Education and economy/commerce were what most students mentioned.

“I want the EU to help us develop our own educational system and our universities so that we don’t have this migration to Europe all the time.” – Student 16.

“The EU has got something to contribute when it comes to commerce, the economy, the governance, and with environmental issues.” – Student 3.

11.) Do you consider the EU's presence in Morocco satisfying or disappointing?

Both satisfying and disappointing	Could be better	Could be more visible
2	4	3
Disappointing	Should be better adapted	Satisfying
1	4	2

One fourth of the students answered that the EU's presence in Morocco should be better adapted. Four students wanted the EU's presence to be less. Three students thought that the EU's presence could be more visible. Two said that it is both satisfying and disappointing. Two answered that it is satisfying and one said that it is disappointing.

Could be better: *"I definitely think that the EU could do more, for example by pressuring authoritarian regimes to ensure they respect human rights. The EU is just interested in having a relationship without trying to develop the democracy, which I think is hypocritical."* – Student 10.

Should be better adapted: *"Concerning democracy, it is not that it wouldn't work in Morocco and in other Arab countries, but it needs to be adapted to the local situation. I guess that the development of Morocco primarily needs to be an internal thing."* – Student 13.

7 Analysis

7.1 Background data

Three quarters of the students considered themselves well or relatively well informed about the EU. There was no clear difference in terms of gender or academic level. However, the students at AUI were slightly more confident about their knowledge on the EU than the students at EGE. Surprisingly, the students of economics were also somewhat more confident about their knowledge of the EU than the students of political science.

Previous research has shown that the knowledge of the EU seems to be positively correlated with the level of education and the geographical as well as historical proximity to Europe. This corresponds well since the Moroccan students interviewed were relatively highly educated, and there is naturally both a geographical and historical proximity to Europe.

Nevertheless, as few as three students mentioned the Advanced Status and only one student mentioned the European Neighbourhood Policy, even though these agreements frame the Moroccan-EU relations, which means that there is a gap of knowledge amongst the students and/or communication problems of the EU.

7.2 The EU as a super power

Fifteen out of sixteen students considered the EU a super power or at least a super power in some aspects. This perception is remarkably high compared to other parts of the world, even if it is in line with the theory that major recipients of EU aid tend to view the EU as a super power.

According to thirteen out of sixteen students, i.e. 81%, the EU is Morocco's most important counterpart for the time being, even if there were some tendencies that this might not be the case in the future. This is even higher than in previous statistics that have shown that 75% of Moroccans consider the EU as an important counterpart.

After the EU, the most commonly answered other important counterparts to Morocco were China and Africa. This gives another picture than previous research that has stated that the EU in many parts of the world is perceived to be less important than the USA. However, previous research has noticed that China

is perceived to gradually be overshadowing the EU, which there were elements of in the students' perceptions too.

The EU was mainly considered to have the role of an economic power by eleven out of sixteen students. This image corresponds with previous research, which states the predominant external perception of the EU having a role of an economic power, both amongst the elite and the public opinion.

Only one student mainly considered the EU having the role of a normative power. This perception is in line with previous research that has pointed out the lack of image of the EU having a normative role. However, this perception does not correspond to previous research saying that the EU as a normative power is more prominent to the neighbouring countries of the EU. The absence of image of the EU as a normative power amongst the students corresponds well to already seen reasons. The EU is not understood of having a special role in the normative field; human rights are universal and not European rights, for instance. Moreover, the EU is not a role model when it comes to norms for reasons such as the colonial past and how Muslims are treated in Europe.

Even though as few as two students mainly considered the EU having the role as a postcolonial power, some postcolonial tendencies were recognised. This confirms what has been stated in previous research, which is that there is a view of the EU using similar approaches as during the colonial era.

According to the students, the EU is only considered to be credible in some aspects or credible if it benefits the EU itself. Similar perceptions have previously been stated in Morocco, such as the EU being selfish and only protecting its own interests.

7.3 Values of the EU

The values and norms that primarily were mentioned when it comes to the EU were in chronological order: human rights, unification, democracy, liberty and women's rights. These values are in comparison with previous research relatively unexpectedly positive, especially when it comes to the values of human rights and liberty. However, in Morocco, human rights have previously been mentioned as an important area of cooperation with the EU as well as a field where the EU should play a bigger role. The frequently mentioned value of democracy is also less unexpected since 81% of Moroccans previously have stated that the EU helps the promotion of democracy in the country. Interestingly, this corresponds well with previous research in eastern neighbouring countries to the EU, where the EU is associated with democracy and human rights.

Even though this study focuses on the EU, the perception of Europe is also of interest since of course most of the countries in Europe are part of the EU. In addition, such as many of the students have pointed out, the EU and Europe are highly associated with each other. The most commonly associated notion with Europe in chronological order was colonialism, diversity, the EU, and racism/islamophobia. The latter notion confirms previous research that the

negative treatment of Muslim populations inside Europe is noticed externally. The perception of the EU as an organisation seems to be better than the view of Europe as a continent, since the former is more associated with positive values. Furthermore, the negative postcolonial perceptions seem to be more associated with Europe than with the EU.

The EU was perceived in positive or in mainly positive terms amongst a majority of the students, i.e. 56% of them. Previous research has shown that an even bigger part of Moroccans perceive the EU positively, namely 79%. Six of the students perceived the EU in both positive and negative terms. Such an ambivalent and nuanced view of the EU has been seen in various parts of the world before.

7.4 EU-Moroccan relations

62.5% of the students considered the EU as a legitimate actor that has something valuable to contribute to Morocco. This result is somewhat in line with similar previous research showing that 75% of Moroccans tend to trust the EU.

Concerning what the EU could contribute with, economics/commerce as well as education were at the top of the list amongst the students. Human rights, development and politics/governance were also relatively frequently mentioned. This corresponds very much with previous research where the fields within which the EU should play a bigger role in Morocco are in chronological order: the commerce, the economic development, migration, education, foreign affairs, transport and human rights. Once again, the perception of EU as an economic power is predominating and exceeds the view of the EU as a normative power, just as in existing literature.

There were various answers to whether the students consider the EU's presence in Morocco satisfying or disappointing. The most common answers were that the EU's presence could be better adjusted to the Moroccan situation. This lack of the EU not taking the characteristics of the region into account and not listening to the concerns of developing countries is an impression that previously has been noticed.

Three students also mentioned that the EU's presence in Morocco could be a lot more visible and better communicated. This does on the contrary not conform to previous statistics saying that 62% of Moroccans think that there is enough information about the EU.

8 Conclusion

When summarising the results in this study, the EU is undoubtedly considered a super power, mainly having the role of an economic power. The EU is perceived as Morocco's most important counterpart at present, but might not be in the future, as China and Africa are becoming increasingly important counterparts. The EU is considered positive or mainly positive and believed to have something valuable to contribute to Morocco, mainly in terms of economics, commerce, or education. Values that the EU is associated with are human rights, unification and democracy.

Nevertheless, the EU is not considered having the role as a normative power neither a postcolonial power, even though there are some postcolonial tendencies. Europe is associated with colonialism, diversity, the EU, as well as racism and islamophobia. The EU is only seen to be credible in some aspects or credible if it benefits the EU itself. Moreover, the EU's presence in Morocco could be better adjusted to the Moroccan situation. The visibility and communication of the EU's presence in Morocco could also improve.

As demonstrated, the general perception of the EU in Morocco is relatively positive; it is better than expected and better than in many other parts of the world. However, the image is mixed. In Morocco, the EU is also perceived in positive terms – even though there are recognised postcolonial tendencies. The EU is associated with human rights, unification, and democracy – at the same time that it is not considered having the role of a normative power. Moreover, the EU is perceived as a legitimate actor that has something to contribute to Morocco – but only if it benefits itself. This all proves to show that the perception of the EU in Morocco is nuanced, since the EU is seen in both positive and negative terms, as well as it is contradictory, since the perceptions are not always aligned. The overall conclusion is that the perception of the EU in Morocco is complex and ambivalent.

On the whole, the perceptions found in Morocco correspond well to previous research in the sense that most perceptions have already been mapped out. However, the combination of perceptions in Morocco is different compared to what has been seen before. Even though the different elements of the Moroccan perception have been seen in previous research, no country or region in the existing literature corresponds completely to the findings in this study.

9 Discussion

A reason to why the perception of the EU in Morocco is more positive than in many parts of the world might be that Europe, which the EU is naturally highly associated with, is somewhat of the “dreamland” and a role model for the Moroccan population. During the past decades, Europe has been a continent of wealth and civilisation that has been highly influential in Morocco. As the former King Hassan II put it: “Morocco may have its roots in Africa, but its leaves are always turned towards Europe.” Another explanation to this positive image is that Morocco has such a strong (economic) dependence on the EU, which is why they cannot afford to have a negative or critical view of it.

An explanation to why the EU is seen as a super power, with the main role of an economic power being the most important counterpart, is most likely also because of the strong economic ties. This perception is probably strengthened by the geographical proximity to the EU, being only 14 km away. The euro as well as the EU’s single market probably adds the view of the EU as an economic power.

The reason why the EU is not primarily considered as having the role of a normative power has probably got to do with the opinion of the EU not being in the right of taking on this role. The Moroccan population is for instance aware of the crimes on humanities that were committed during colonialism, and of the discrimination of Muslims as well as racism towards Arabs in Europe. In addition, the EU is probably seen less of a normative power than an economic power since the impression is that the EU acts according to its own benefits.

The perception that the EU is not mainly a postcolonial power is probably because this role of the EU is too simplified. However, the postcolonial tendencies that were found most likely exist considering that the colonial past is still in many inhabitants’ memory. The view of the EU only being credible if it benefits itself may also stem from the historical past, and perhaps from previous experience with the EU.

After economic and commerce, education was mentioned as something the EU could contribute with. This is not surprising since Europe, and France in particular, is highly associated with education in Morocco. France implemented an educational system in Morocco during the colonial era and French was until the seventies the official language within primary education, and still is at universities. This answer naturally also reflects the interview target of the study, being students.

From listening to what Moroccan students had to say about the EU, it has become clear that the EU’s communication is insufficient. Firstly, the EU needs to communicate better what they are actually doing in Morocco. Only one student knew about the European Neighbourhood Policy for example, which according to the EU is the most important agreement that frames the whole EU-Moroccan

relationship. Secondly, the EU needs to communicate clearer that they are not only present in Morocco for its own benefit, given that this is the case. Furthermore, the EU's policies should adapt better to the local situation and the country's characteristics should be taken better into account. If the EU uses too standardised and Eurocentric methods they risk being perceived as patronising and moralising, which naturally influences their effectiveness. Another important insight stressed by the Moroccan students is that the will to change needs to come from the inside in order to be successfully implemented. An alarming perception was that the EU is predicted to be less of an important counterpart in the future and that Morocco's relations with China and the rest of Africa will possibly be more important. This is naturally also very important for the EU to keep in mind.

The reason why the overall perception of the EU in Morocco differs from what has been found in other parts of the world must be because the perceptions reflect the historical, political, economic, and social uniqueness of the complex and diverse country that is Morocco.

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11 Appendix

11.1 Semi-structured interview with the students

Nom ?
Name?

Sexe ?
Sex?

Quel âge avez-vous ?
How old are you?

Qu'étudiez-vous ? (Discipline académique, niveau, université)
What do you study? (Academic discipline, level and university)

Quelle est votre nationalité et quelle est votre ville d'origine ?
What is your nationality and birthplace?

1.) Qu'est-ce que vous associez à l'Europe?
What do you associate with Europe?

2.) Considérez-vous que vous êtes bien informé(e) sur l'UE ?
Do you consider yourself well informed about the EU?

3.) Quelles valeurs et normes associez-vous à l'UE ?
What values and norms do you associate the EU with?

4.) Pouvez-vous mentionner quelques exemples des coopérations entre l'UE et le Maroc ?
Can you mention any example of EU-Moroccan cooperation?

5.) Percevez-vous l'UE positivement ou négativement ?
Do you perceive the EU in positive or negative terms?

6.) Considérez-vous l'UE comme une grande puissance ?
Do you consider the EU to be a super power?

- 7.) Considérez-vous l'UE comme une force normative, comme une force économique ou comme une force postcoloniale ?
Do you mainly consider the EU as a normative power, as an economic power or as a postcolonial power?
- 8.) Pensez-vous que les promesses de l'UE sont crédibles ?
Do you see the EU's promises as credible?
- 9.) Considérez-vous que l'UE est le partenaire le plus important du Maroc ?
(Ou est-ce les États-Unis, la France, l'Espagne ou un autre pays ?)
Do you consider the EU as Morocco's most important counterpart? (Or is it the US, France, Spain or any other country?)
- 10.) Considérez-vous l'UE comme un acteur légitime qui a quelque chose de valable à apporter au Maroc ?
Do you consider the EU as a legitimate actor that has something valuable to contribute to Morocco?
- 11.) Considérez-vous que la présence de l'UE au Maroc est satisfaisante ou décevante ?
Do you consider the EU's presence in Morocco satisfying or disappointing?