



**POLICY BRIEF
ON SOCIO-ECONOMIC
RIGHTS
IN MOROCCO**

February 18, 2016

***“WHERE IS THE WEALTH?”*
ECHOING THE KING’S 2014 SPEECH IN LIGHT OF THE
DELAY IN THE IMPLEMENTATION OF THE NEW
CONSTITUTION**

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1. WHICH SOCIAL GRIEVANCES WERE EXPRESSED IN MOROCCO IN 2011?

Morocco is placed 130th of 187 countries on the Human Development Index (HDI), close to the 'Weakest States' section. The UNDP (United Nations Programme for Development) contends that Morocco's gross per capita income has not improved much between 1990 and 2012. The UNDP notes that "growth and development do not come hand in hand". It also warns Morocco that in the absence of specific policies aimed at allocating resources to the poor, investing in the domains of health and education, encouraging job creation, protecting the environment and natural resources from overexploitation, promoting non-discrimination between the sexes, redistributing public assets and revenues, and discouraging systematic emigration -, no real increase in the Index of Human Development will occur. (Berrada, 2014, 287)

Three of the main social problems are poverty, youth unemployment and lack of education. Morocco has many weak groups that should be eligible for special actions (rural people, marginalized youth, women and the disabled) and some structural problems (low-skilled jobs, illiteracy, urban/rural and regional divides, growing inequality, high state budget deficit) in need of being addressed.

The Arab Barometer (2012-2014) found out that the common reasons behind the Arab uprisings in the Maghreb countries had been (in order): the improvement of economic conditions, civil rights and dignity. Grievances equally shared by lower and upper middle classes, not just the bottom 40% of the population. Many Arab people lamented the lack of efforts by the respective governments to increase high quality jobs, improve the education system and public services, such as public transportation, roads and infrastructure, and provide affordable housing. The World Bank report, based on this data, sums up the Maghreb citizens' grievances as "the unhappiness associated with low standards of living, widespread corruption and lack of fairness" (MENA Economic Monitor, WB, Oct. 2015: 29).

The dominant political economic model in Maghreb countries before 2011 had been the so-called “authoritarian bargain” (Yousef et al., 2007). The latter was based on the provision of poor-quality public education and health services, subsidised energy and food and guarantees to public employment in exchange for political support. It was expected that, given the level of popular discontent, those policies would have been the main target of the reforms in the pipeline. A new social contract would have been the product of two conflicting needs: the need to reform the old system in a less rent seeking and state-driven and -centralised model and the need to grant citizens increased socio-economic rights. On the one hand, state bureaucracy should have been reduced, while on the other, state resources destined to cater to citizens’ socio-economic needs had to be boosted. A difficult challenge from the beginning, considering that even in countries like Tunisia, which has, so far, been spared from civil war and is overall considered to be a success-story, the balance between those conflicting needs has not been found and social cohesion is now showing the first cracks. Almost everywhere, a new social contract is still missing and social unrest is again on the rise.

In Morocco, the new Constitution promised by King Mohammed VI in 2011 has raised high expectations regarding the improvement of socio-economic standards in the country and the possible redistribution of national wealth in a more transparent and democratic way. The party in power, the Islamist Justice and Freedom Party (PJD), had also raised hopes, saying the fight against corruption and social equality would be its “strong suits”. Just like Tunisia and Egypt, Moroccan demonstrators of the 20 February Movement had taken to the streets to ask for more freedom and democracy, but also to call for social equality and an end to corruption. Many of the grievances and the claims raised by demonstrators fell within the domain of socio-economic rights. Even though it might still be early to take stock, five years down the road, it is possible to provide a first assessment of the major changes in Morocco in the socio-economic area. The attempt is to analyse whether the improvements introduced by the new Constitution have met the expectations of the people standing up for their rights in the wake of the Arab Spring, or whether the Kingdom of Morocco has fallen short on its promise to undertake structural change.

2. THE 2011 CONSTITUTION: A NEW SOCIAL CONTRACT?

Which kind of breakthrough represents the 2011 Constitution in terms of socio-economic rights?

The new constitutional text raised high expectations, promising to focus on five priority axes: (1) the “Advanced Regionalisation Project”, (2) the improvement of public services and of the administration, (3) the evaluation of public policies, (4) social accountability and (5) the enhancement of institutional consultative mechanisms between the public administration and civil society.

A number of articles of the new text deal in detail with socio-economic rights; Art. 31 is meant to strengthen the protection of socio-economic rights at constitutional level, establishing a clear duty for the state to enforce “socio-economic and environmental” rights for all citizens alike. Among the main rights falling under this domain are the right to health, to social protection, to a modern education, to decent housing, to a safe environment and to sustainable development. Art. 35, building upon those premises, defines the guarantee to pursue sustainable development together with “social justice and the preservation of natural resources”. Articles 135 and 136 mention the project of “Advanced Regionalisation” as the new orientation of national development in view to achieve a country “unified among its regions”, by the re-allocation of powers among national, regional and local institutions. Finally, articles 151-171 cover the principles of “good governance” and establish a set of new institutions in

charge of supervising the implementation of the socio-economic rights safeguarded by the Constitution.¹ In brief, the 2011 Constitution legally provides a better framework for the concrete advancement of socio-economic rights.

However, reality is very different. Since 2011, the two Moroccan governments (the PJD, Justice and Development Party-led Benkirane I in 2011 and Benkirane II in 2013²) have had little or no room to spearhead any change. Some analysts, like the renowned economist Najib Akesbi, have pointed out the limited powers (and thus responsibility) enjoyed by the Prime Minister in setting the government's economic agenda under the new Constitutional text. Under the former (1996) Constitution, art. 51 used to undermine the possibility of the government to reverse the economic orientations of the country by stating that the superior duty of the government and the parliament is to keep "budgetary balance", thus tying both institutions' hands to neoliberal policies. In practice, the government cannot pass any amendment aimed at "curtailing or increasing public expenditures". It turned both the government and parliament into simple recording houses of decisions taken elsewhere. A provision left unchanged in the new 2011 Constitution, where the new art. 77 literally reproduced the former art. 51, established that neither the legislative nor the executive powers could reduce or burden the state budget.

Despite the government's limited power to pass financial laws and reforms, the prime minister is held accountable nonetheless. This leaves any government with almost no chance of reversing the orientation and pace of major economic reforms, while at the same time it is incapable of passing new social measures. Therefore, playing the election card and being in power may turn out to be a politically risky activity for any party. However, the PJD-led government apparently does not seem to suffer from the limitation: it has even invoked art. 77 to its advantage while confronting the trade unions on the issuing of the Finance law in 2013.

The PJD-led government has never even challenged or opened a debate on the restriction of its powers in other economically sensitive political domains. At first glance, in fact, the new Constitution seems to have expanded the authority of the prime minister. The PM can now appoint many high officials heading important institutions, such as the Compensation Fund, the Moroccan Retirement Fund, Hospital Research Centres, Regional Offices for the Enhancement of Agriculture, etc.³ Some of those posts are socially sensitive, as they lie at the forefront of unpopular reforms the government ought to pass quickly in order to curb the state's budget deficit. However, the non-elected executive, the monarchy, still retains the exclusive competence to appoint the heads of all 'strategic' institutions. Those comprise many pivotal national companies⁴, ranging from banks to hospitals, funds, national industries, infrastructures and transport companies.

These broad prerogatives are defined as the "Economic Makhzen", or the economic "deep state" (Akesbi, 2014: 276). The Economic Makhzen is an informal system of power comprising economic and financial assets, controlled by the royal family and the elites close to the palace. The king himself is a major landowner and controls important shares of strategic

¹ Among those new institutions, there are the CESE (Economic, Social and Environmental Council), the Ombudsman, the Council of the Moroccan community residing abroad, the Council of Competition and the National Instance of Integrity and the Instance for the Prevention and Fight against Corruption

² After a government reshuffling due to the exit of the Istiqlal (Independence) Party from the government's coalition.

³ Other institutions falling under the prime minister's power of appointment: the National Agency for Job and Skills Promotion, the Centre for the Export Promotion, the SME (Small and Medium Enterprises) National Agency, the National Mutual Aid Fund.

⁴ Such as Maghreb Bank, the Hassan II Fund, the Crédit Agricole Maroc Bank, the Popular Central Bank, the CIH Bank, the National Organization of Railways (ONCF), the Tanger-Med society in charge of building the new harbour, the Phosphates State Company (OCP, Office Chérifien de Phosphates), the national airways carrier (Royal Air Maroc), the national electrical company (ONEE), the CDG (Deposits and Management Fund)

companies, such as the National Investment Company, the phosphate industry, and several financial and insurance companies, as a *Reuters* article revealed⁵. Even if the king is portrayed as a national arbiter above partisan interests, he lies at the core of the economic system, which is mainly based on a few big national companies, of which the royal family owns many shares. As Layachi (2016) states: the royal “conflict of interest is one of the biggest obstacles to sound economic reforms which could lift millions of Moroccan out of poverty” (Layachi, 2016:216).

Therefore, and notwithstanding the rhetoric of the “Roy-citoyen” (Monjib, 2015) ⁶, the palace remains a step above any other state power. For example, art. 52 strictly regulates the institutional relations on communications between the two elected chambers and the palace (the king), establishing that royal communications can be addressed to the nation by the king any time he wishes, without debate or objection. If someone dares to raise questions or criticise any clause of his speeches to the nation, clear sanctions are envisaged. Furthermore, no debate could address the “great works” – or rather the greatest business projects of development –, which are all pooled together as “strategic orientations” pertaining to the Council of Ministries and directly superseded by the king himself, with little or no supervision of neither the government nor the parliament (according to art. 49). The king personally still enjoys great popularity among his subjects thanks to his youthful image, his activism and his ability to always be at the forefront in the promotion of those major development projects, but at least two of his decisions have stirred criticisms. The first has been his backing of the increase in the price of fuel, which directly touches millions of people, and secondly his choice to withhold some 15 billion DHR of state investments because of budgetary problems (Akesbi, 2014, 275).

All this notwithstanding, the king’s authority remains undisputed and unchallenged, either by the 20 February Movement or other protestors or by the PJD, now in power. With the unique exception of the outcast Islamist movement *Adl-wa-al-Ihsane* (Justice and Spirituality Movement)⁷, none has dared to ask to review the political role of the monarchy. PJD Head of Government Benkirane even depicts the cohabitation between himself and the King as idyllic, despite the fact that the Makhzen openly interferes in the party’s internal affairs by supporting appeasing candidates over anti-establishment ones or rejecting some party leaders altogether over considerations of public (but, in fact, royal) interest⁸.

One could say that the palace’s grip has strengthened and the government’s “soft” crackdown on NGOs and opposition groups has become more evident: particularly since 2013, the palace has opted for increasing control on extra-parliamentary opposition parties and advocacy groups. However, it does so in a disguised way, inspired by the principle of *divide et impera*: blaming different groups for different, tailored-made problems. It accuses the Islamists of conjugal infidelity, the young activists of the 20 February Movement of drug consumption, the Left and Marxists supporters of graft and disloyalty to the state, as receivers of foreign funds⁹. Repression further accentuated in 2014, when the Minister of Interior declared that

⁵ Karam S., “Morocco Regulator in Pledge on Monarchy-owned firms” *Reuters*, 30 September 2011, www.reuters.com/article/2011/09/30/idUSL5E7KU2VA20110930.

⁶ Maati Monjib, *EUSpring Policy Brief*, October 2015.

⁷ al-Mutawakkil, head of the Political Department of the ‘Adl wa al-Ihsane, published on the group’s website: “Why do we not the call things by their name? Why do we not define the side responsible for this blatant interference in the institutions’ work, even the internal affairs of parties, as seen with Mr. Abdelali Hamieddine, who was forced to abandon the leadership of his team in the chamber of advisors... The one governing the country is the king.” (Interview to Al-Mutawakkil, “Moroccan political map drawn up before elections”, 11 nov.2015, *al-Jamaa.net*, <http://www.aljamaa.net/ar/document/101623.shtml>)

⁸ See the case of the removal of Mustapha Ramid as Parliamentary Head of Delegation in 2003 and that, more recent, of ‘hawk’ Abdelali Hamieddine from the Chamber of Advisors.

⁹ Maati Monjib, « Traquenards et calomnies contre les dissidents au Maroc », *Orient XXI*, 30 March 2015, <http://orientxxi.info/magazine/traquenards-et-calomnies-contre-les-dissidents-au-maroc,0847>. On March 31,

foreign-funded NGOs would be persecuted because of their “hostile activities hampering the war on terror”¹⁰. A new sophisticated software was used in the surveillance of cyber activists and the 20 February Movement’s nostalgic supporters, in order to carefully monitor their exchanges and opinions expressed on social media and put pressures on them and their families.

The result of this repressive trend is the gradual fragmentation of the 20 February Movement activist, out of fear of being arrested or harassed. At the same time, a widespread propaganda campaign is convincing public opinion that the Moroccan state is stable and the only entity that stands in the way of jihadi terrorism and civil war. In addition, this antidemocratic campaign is causing widespread democratic disaffection, visible in the low rate of electoral participation in the last round of regional and local elections (53%)¹¹.

3. BETTER ECONOMY FOR ALL, BENEFITS FOR SOME

Despite the fact that four years may not be a sufficient amount of time to assess global changes, it seems that overall macroeconomic trends have positively improved in Morocco, whereas socio-economic rights have advanced only modestly.

The World Bank (WB) judges Morocco a “bon élève”, rating its economy as “performant” and “picking up” in 2015¹². According to the WB data, agricultural output is projected to increase by 14 % and GDP growth to reach 4.7 %. Inflation is kept under 2% and unemployment has “declined” to 9.3%. Moreover, the most important macroeconomic reforms carried out by the government (the restructuring of the Compensation Fund’s and the foreign investment climate improvement¹³) seem rewarding. The fiscal deficit has been reduced to 4.6% of GDP in 2015. (WB, Oct. 2015: 47). Thus, the World Bank concludes on a positive note that “the current coalition government, led by the moderate Islamist party, PJD, is continuing to roll out constitutional reforms and taking bold steps to reduce the fiscal debt.”¹⁴ In 2016, thanks to the low price of energy and, in particular, of fuel, the government hails a particularly favourable international economic environment, likely to encourage and boost Moroccan exports and agriculture and further boost reforms.

In its 2011 electoral platform, the PJD had lamented the “aborted growth despite huge resources” and had promised a yearly rate of 7% growth, while keeping the budget deficit low.¹⁵ For the fiscal year of 2016, the government has committed itself to further reduce the state’s budget deficit to 3.7% of the GDP and has lowered the growth rate to 4.6% because of drought and a substantial decrease in Foreign Direct Investments (FDI). In order to keep its financial engagements, it is doing every effort: for example, in the 2013 it froze some 15 billion worth of credit for investments in the finance law following the palace’s proposal.¹⁶ However, this

the day after the publication, Professor Monjib received a death threat for the critical content of the article on a website close to the intelligence services (Agorà press).

¹⁰ Ibid.

¹¹ However, this is only the official record, which according to some sources could be much lower.

¹² The PJD expected a growth rate of 5% in 2015-2016, but it had to review estimates downwards after the release of the Yearly Report of the Court of Auditors. In Moroccan economy forecasts, many and wide fluctuations may be expected as the economy mostly relies on agricultural outputs, which vary extensively from one year to the next.

¹³ The latter has spurred consistent direct investments from the Gulf Cooperation countries in the last two years (2014-15). However, the reform of the Compensation Fund, initially meant to hand out direct financial aids to families in need, has not been implemented.

¹⁴ <http://www.worldbank.org/en/country/morocco/overview>.

¹⁵ *Les Echos*, 1 December 2011, http://www.lesechos.fr/01/12/2011/lesechos.fr/0201773984971_maroc---le-programme-du-pjd-a-la-loupe.htm.

¹⁶ <http://www.medias24.com/ECONOMIE/2091-Le-ministere-des-Finances-refuse-de-diffuser-la-liste-detaillee-des-coups-budgetaires.html>

provision has led to the closure of hospitals in rural areas and the creation of overcharged school classes in rural and urban districts. In 2016, the government plans to cut on subsidised carbon energy, increase taxation on gas and electricity consumption¹⁷, while continuing to lift fiscal pressure, particularly on industrial activities and high revenues. The government aims at re-investing most of the collected taxpayers' money in further cuts to the state's deficit.

Nonetheless, by curbing the deficit, which appears to be one of the priorities dominating the two PJD-led governments' agenda, the government undermines its self-proclaimed efforts to address the distress of large swathes of the population. In fact, because of the permanent emergency need to cut the state's budget, there is little room left for revising or reversing the political economic trend followed so far. Socio-economic problems will not be addressed without taking stock of the ruinous policies carried out hitherto (Berrada, 2014). If no social relief will be provided in the coming years, more and more people will take the way of illegal emigration and incidents as the one that occurred in February 2014 – which viewed many young people drowning after being shot by the Spanish border police while trying to reach Spain – will become more frequent, showing the pitfalls of Moroccan development.

The economy and the development strategy still rely on major projects carried out by the government, based on Royal decisions (the so-called “royal yards”), neither chosen nor approved by any elected institution. They consist of sectorial projects (Plan Azur or Green Morocco), broad agreements (Deep and Comprehensive Agreements with the EU), developmental projects with a social orientation (INDH, National Initiative for Human Development) and public infrastructure projects, such as the high-speed railway tracks (TGV). They have all been selected by the Royal Palace without democratic consultation. (Akesbi, 2014, 261) They can benefit the country's economy, but will hardly push the country to embark on a new course, or lead to an extension of socio-economic rights, meeting citizens' expectations.

4. THE MAJOR SOCIAL AND ECONOMIC CHALLENGES AHEAD

Morocco still struggles with major structural problems, with little advancement of socio-economic rights and per capita income. Since 2011, there have been at least five major reforms in the pipeline: (a) the labour market, (b) education, (c) the Retirement Fund, (d) the new Universal Health Insurance and the (e) Advanced Regionalisation Project. In addition, another broader issue relevant to the socio-economic agenda was the fight against corruption (f) in state and private institutions. The PJD's powerful election campaign in 2011 focused on this aspect, promising to fight against financial and political corruption, as much as against the rentier economy benefiting the ruling elite. In this sense, the 2011 Constitution has introduced major changes and new instruments for the government to act in sensitive socio-economic domains, but both their tangible impact and the political determination to convert them into concrete programs remain questionable.

4.1 THE LABOUR MARKET: A SHORTAGE OF JOBS BUT A CONSTANT INCREASE OF THE TOTAL WAGE BILL

Morocco has the third largest population in the Arab world, after Egypt and Algeria: over 33 million people. The labour market is still predominantly composed of the public sector, accompanied by a huge and opaque black labour market, consistent and permanent migration waves bringing in high remittances from abroad and an unemployment rate oscillating around 10%. The working population rate in Morocco is continuously on the rise and will reach its peak

¹⁷ <http://www.liberte-algerie.com/chronique/loi-de-finances-2016-lf-2016-point-dappui-pour-les-reformes-structurelles-314>

of 65% (22,200,000 workers) in a few years (2018). Youth unemployment is still much higher than the average (almost 32%), with 18% of them consisting of unemployed graduates. Women are also more affected than men (Berrada, 2014: 289).

Morocco's economic growth in the previous years has not translated into the creation of more jobs, and surely not qualified ones.

The huge public sector accounts for 577,691 jobs (2013)¹⁸ and continues to grow (by 1.6%) each year (Halaoui, 2014: 48)¹⁹. Together, the public and private sector succeed in creating about 41,000 jobs each year, compared to a demand of some 107.000 new jobs. It can be said that the state is still the greatest employer in Morocco but it is not one of the greatest job-creator, particularly when it comes to young people: 52% of its employees are above 45 years-old, and the public administration struggles to absorb the new university graduates, who still consider a public function as the best avenue for their carrier. The reason why so many young graduates still aspire to be hired within the public sector is understandable. First, young graduates are still lured by the prospects of a permanent job with sound guarantees, such as layoff indemnity, retirement wage and sick leave. Second, young people generally look for a job in the central and more developed areas of the country and most public jobs are offered there²⁰. Altogether, half of the jobs are concentrated in the four major cities, exactly the place where most young people end up.

For the fiscal year 2016, the government has announced the creation of some 26,000 new jobs in the public sector despite budgetary cuts: this provision seems a reasonable response to the young graduates' consistent pressure. However, it seems at odds with the government policies followed so far. In fact, in 2013 the government had announced a tightening of hiring procedures for unemployed youths, asserting that the number of jobs available would be proportional to the budget. Benkirane had even declared that the PJD "would do its best to democratise the access to the 25,000 posts available in the public service and at the local authorities, but with absolute transparency, by an open competitive exam based on merit." The new constitutional text prescribes the introduction of the principle of open competition for civil functions, but most of the unemployed graduates (diplômés chômeurs), staging protest movements and sit-ins each week, lay claim to the unfulfilled promise by previous governments to grant them a permanent job. In addition, the new posts announced for 2016 do not even match current trends in job demand, resulting in a constant, albeit marginal, raise in unemployment levels (HCP, Haute Commissariat au Plan, "Situation du marché du travail au troisième trimestre de l'année 2015"). Therefore, government policies in the public sector seem inconsistent with the PJD's general political economic orientation and driven by contingency.

In terms of job creation, Morocco has to struggle on another front as well. Growth is still mainly the product of the three traditional sectors; services, agriculture and public infrastructure. A great majority of these jobs require little to no skills (65%), while 30% are in informal family-business. The industrial and processing sectors, which could kickstart a strong economic growth, cannot compete at international level as they lack skilled labourers²¹. Agriculture alone continues to employ 42.4% of the working population, with industry and public works employing only 12.4 and 8.2% respectively (UNDP data, 2014). The service sector, employing 37%, is the third biggest employer but ¾ consists of precarious jobs in terms of both

¹⁸ Non-including the army personnel.

¹⁹ Rapport sur les Ressources Humaines accompagnant le Projet de Loi de Finance 2014.

²⁰ The urban region of Rabat-Salé-Zemmour-Zaer (18% jobs), the Great Casablanca area (10%) and two more competitive regions, such as the area of Tanger-Tétouan (7%) and that of Marrakesh-Tansif-el-Haouz (8%)

²¹ The industrial and processing sectors' share in the country's GDP has regressed from 18% (2000) to the current 14% (2011).

stability and remuneration and employs mainly uneducated men on a seasonal trend. Thus, the employment rate in the service sector is partially hiding the overall unemployment rate. Thus, the context of labour in Morocco paints a very worrying image. Not only are there no policies specifically targeting youth unemployment to ease social hardship, but the jobs that are being created are mainly low-skilled posts. Stable growth and a successful reconversion of the labour market to high-skilled jobs seems to be hindered by the persistence of a high illiteracy rate (overall 40%) and the lack of qualified workers. Without substantial public investments in the reform of education and the restructuring of the labour market, it seems extremely difficult for the economy to embark on a different path. However, given the fiscal engagements and the neoliberal macro-economic orientation followed by all Moroccan governments since 1992²², it is very unlikely that these faults will be redressed.

The PJD's stance on other labour rights is even more problematic: a good example is provided by the clampdown on labour strikes. The Government, confronted in 2011-2012 by huge and continuous waves of strikes of all job categories – including town and regional civil servants–, issued a new regulation freezing the wage of workers for each day of the strike.²³ The critical reaction of trade unions, which disapproved of the communication criticizing the non-participatory approach adopted by the government, was to no avail. On the contrary, the pro-government press rejoiced and backed up the reform, evaluating its outcome as very positive because of the swift and dramatic decrease in the percentage of strikes (from 80% to 14% in 2014²⁴). Until now the promised organic bill governing strikes has not yet been issued but the government means to interdict and undermine strikes in the public sector as much as possible.

The government has also shown a tendency to consult periodically with the Employers' Union (CGEM), while avoiding confrontation with trade unions on issues of general political interest (social dialogue) and limiting the meetings between the government and trade unions to targeted consultations. This stance reflects the respective power of the two organisations: the CGEM is a unified and influential force, whereas trade unions divided and poorly-organised. This practice unveils a negative perception by the PJD of trade unions' work and the intention to minimise their role in society: a stance that denies the social value of intermediate bodies. It outlines a preference for a model of public consultation structured around the executive power and a fluid and disarrayed civil society, and an obsession for the tenet of "social peace and cohesion".

The only pro-social justice government provisions have been a slight increase in the minimum monthly salary (Smig, Salaire minimum inter-professionnel garanti) to 2350 DHR (211 euros) and the introduction of a small unemployment allowance in the private sector²⁵. On the other hand, on the side of the fight against unemployment, the limited success achieved in the graduates' placement by the ANAPEC (National Agency for Job and Competence Promotion)²⁶ dates back well before the introduction of the 2011 Constitution and its mandate is limited to the major cities, where all major industrial sites are²⁷.

In sum, despite its claim to redress the labour shortage, improve the quality of jobs and work to tackle unemployment, the PJD has done little in the labour domain, beyond alienating part of

²² 1992 is the year when Morocco abandoned the policy of planning to adopt neoliberal policies in the economy.

²³ Communication of the Minister of Justice Mostafa Ramid to all Courts issued on 2 November, 2011 (al-Ahdath al Maghribia, November 3, 2011).

²⁴ *L'Economiste*, 13 March 2011. (Bensouda, page 185)

²⁵ The unemployment wage consists of 70% of the former wage, is limited to six months and applies only to the private sector.

²⁶ Established in 2000, well before the new Constitution.

²⁷ Great Casablanca, Rata-Salé and Tanger Tetouan concentrate 50% of the placement offers.

the trade unions, which electorally mean little²⁸. Unexpectedly, it had suffered a significant drop in 2013 after two years in power²⁹, especially after the pullout of the Istiqlal Party, formerly a PJD-ally, from the government coalition, but it did not sharply decrease in the two following years, putting its popularity rate at 47%³⁰. Therefore, it can be concluded that the government actions in the labour field are not the yardstick with which to measure its appreciation by or distance from the citizens. Perhaps, as has sarcastically been pointed out by the intellectual Mohamed Tozy, there is yet no evidence that the “(average) Moroccan voter makes the link between the evaluation of government’s activities and elections³¹.”

4.2 THE REFORM OF EDUCATION: A PUBLIC SCHOOL OF EXCELLENCE WITH NO FINANCIAL INVESTMENTS

The reform of education and that of the labour market are interrelated in a linear way, meaning that the latter cannot succeed without the first. However, education seems even less of a priority in post-2011 Morocco.

Despite clamorous government declarations on the need to carry out a global assessment of the 2009-2012 Emergency Plan on the Reform of Education³², which has achieved very limited results, education is not at the top of the government’s agenda. If the amount of the state budget allocated to the social sector reached overall 55% in 2014, small percentages of the GDP are allocated to vocational training and education (4.5%). The percentage of GDP allocated may be misleading as the government’s views on improving education is to bet on the privatisation of the school system of any order and grade and to rely on private businesses’ initiative.

A second problem concerns school dropouts, with 340,000 pupils abandoning school each year and 172,000 children under the age of 15 working for a loaf of bread or on the black market. According to the World Bank statistics, some 49% of Moroccan youth is neither at school, nor in the workforce: the only choice that is left to them is either to illegally immigrate to Europe or to join radical Islamist groups. As young people currently make up 27.5% of the population and statistics project that this will stay the same until 2030, the ‘youth-factor’ – or rather the pressure put on the government by the 15 to 29-years-old looking for their first job – is one of the main triggers behind the need to reform both education and the job market. Even though the overall national illiteracy rate is dropping, illiteracy among women still represents a major problem – about 40% of women are illiterate–, particularly in rural areas (72%)³³, a condition defining a wide and still existing regional and urban-rural divide. If the national average is 67%, in fact, it could swing between 14.3% in the Machouar-Casablanca region to over 96% in the rural areas close to Essaouira. The only government response to address regional gaps is to build more primary schools in rural areas through INDH projects and funds, which means in an occasional way, deferring any broader and more consistent action to the implementation of the Advanced Regionalisation Project. The problem of the complete

²⁸ The four main trade unions in Morocco represents only 10% of the workers in the private sector and some 150.000 each in the public sector. Altogether, less than 7% of the workers are unionized. See: R. Zaireg, «Maroc, la difficile recherche de l’unité syndicale », *Orient XXI*, May 12, 2014, <http://orientxxi.info/magazine/maroc-la-difficile-recherche-de-l-unite-syndicale,0590>

²⁹ The Istiqlal Party created a political crisis exactly on the lack of government responses to the labour problem.

³⁰ *L’Economiste* and Sunergia surveys, 2015.

³¹ Mohamed Tozy. « Il n’est pas démontré que les électeurs fassent le lien entre le bilan du gouvernement et les élections, à moins que cela devienne une actualité chaude qui crée la polémique », *YaBiladi*, 6 Jan. 2016, <http://www.yabiladi.com/articles/details/41405/petrole-pluviometrie-retraites-attend-gouvernement.html>

³² *L’Economiste*, 23 February 2012.

³³ Even worse, statistics are pointing out that female illiteracy has continuously been growing in Morocco since the 1970s.

lack of qualified teachers in rural areas, similarly to qualified doctors, because of their reluctance to settle down in non-urban localities, is not even raised.

Given the premises and the little budget allocated to education, it is difficult to see how the new and ambitious project launched by the Higher Education Council (CSE, Conseil Supérieur de l'Éducation) – 'Vision pour l'éducation au Maroc 2015-2030' – could succeed in promoting a "new excellent and egalitarian school, accessible to the greatest number of Moroccan citizens". The Report of the Higher Council of Education (CSE) identifies three major challenges for the school system in Morocco: making schools accessible to all pupils, including those living in rural areas or coming from families who cannot afford school-related expenditures; boosting the learning of languages, with an emphasis on Arabic, English and French; and providing schools with more qualified teachers. The reform does not envisage to allocate more resources, nor to provide incentives for qualified teachers to move to the countryside. In addition, the practices of the government are very different from the theories. Between 2008 and 2013, 91 primary and secondary public schools concentrated in the urban areas of Casablanca and Rabat have been closed to be replaced by private ones³⁴: a trend that shows the government wants to discharge itself from the heavy financial burden of education, at least where other options are available. The "School of Excellence" proves itself a void catchphrase, which hides a less alluring reality: that is the project of establishing a separate public-private double track in education leading inevitably either to blue- or white-collar jobs and reinforcing existing inequality rates.

At the same time, at the university level, there is a lively debate about a reform project aimed at strongly reducing the importance of French as a teaching language, in order to re-emphasise the national Islamic and Arabic identity of the country, one qualifying point of the PJD agenda. A point that could be contradictory to the government's orientation, as it is boosting the learning of French as a foreign language in the primary and secondary cycles. Perhaps the explanation lies far away from reforming education, but responds to a stringent political need of the PJD. The Islamist Party has an interest in emphasising the learning of French in the lower cycles to counterbalance and avoid the introduction at all levels of the Tamazigh language, as required by the Constitution, whereas at the University level it aims at spearheading the campaign for Arabic as a pan-Islamic language and the living symbol of a common identity.

The reform is passed off as a socially-sensitive innovation, accommodating the needs of the great majority of Moroccan high school students who face major difficulties in enrolling into university because of their poor knowledge of French. So far, the reform project of the government in the field of education appear crooked and inconsistent, if not tainted by ideology.

In fact, statistics on the educational profile of employees report that 61.5% of Moroccan youths have not finished high school and only 11.2% have graduated from university. What stands out from those data is that the Moroccan labour market it is still more inclined to reward young people with no qualification than with higher ones. The main problem at stake is the lack of qualified jobs, but also the poor quality of the education system. With little or no resources, standards of education are dropping dramatically: a collapse testified by the high rate of unaccepted applications to French Universities of Moroccan BA and MA students.³⁵ In addition,

³⁴ Le Monde, «Maroc : l'école privée est « une source de ségrégation», 6 April 2015, http://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2015/04/16/maroc-l-ecole-privée-est-une-source-de-segregation_4617413_3212.html#t9wTwFhDRojEy0Cq.99

³⁵ CCME, Youssef Chiheb, «La réforme de l'enseignement supérieur au Maroc: un chantier inachevé»: «Le nombre d'étudiants pouvant poursuivre leurs études en France a baissé de plus de 60%, et cela, indépendamment des contraintes liées à l'obtention des visas. Beaucoup de candidatures sont rejetées après examens des dossiers par Campus France», <http://www.ccme.org.ma/fr/opinions/36394>.

the “re-Arabisation trend” of the current government does not help to introduce a good reform of the university system: the obligation to teach in Arabic has not been welcomed by the overall French-speaking teaching body. Moreover, there are far more and better career opportunities available for French-speaking graduates than for Arabic-speaking ones, and finally, because of the influence of the neighbouring European Union, more and more reforms carried out in the field of public policies require a good knowledge of French or English, or else foreigners will be massively employed as consultants.

Therefore, the government view of education seems quite instrumental and the reforms implemented so far paint a very grim image for a country that has presented its citizens with a project of modernisation of the whole educational system as the basis for a new, modern and fair society.

4.3 THE REFORM OF THE RETIREMENT FUND: A NECESSARY BUT SOCIALLY COSTLY STEP

The government has also announced a reform of the retirement law. The reform shall target all sectors of society with the aim of increasing the age of retirement, the amount of the contributions of the employees to the Retirement Fund (CMR, Caisse Marocaine de Retraite), while decreasing the overall amount of the benefits. Despite the comprehensive character of the reform, reaching out to all job categories, the government has decided to start with the fund of public servants.

In fact, there are four different and independent retirement funds in Morocco, each taking care of the rights of different job categories (public officials and civil servants, military, self-employed and liberal professions, agriculture and services). However, the big hurdle in the reform is exactly the sector of civil servants, which consists of some 577,691 people paying contributions for 199,000 retired officers and 68,225 widows. The reform of the Retirement Fund for the public sector has been deemed urgent, as the government has announced that, based on serious studies, by 2022 the state would have some 400,000 retired officers for whom the fund would no longer be able to provide for. It then passed a law increasing civil servants' contribution, from 10% to 14%, raising the age threshold from 60 to 63 years old within three years, while decreasing the discount rate used for the calculation of pensions from 2,5 to 2% by 2019.

The reform has been watered down in comparison to former, more ambitious government plans but it has still discontented the four major trade unions (FDT, Fédération Democratique du Travail, UFTM, Union General de Travailleurs du Maroc, UMT, Union Marocaine du Travail, CDT. Confédération Democratique du Travail). All lament the loss of purchasing power that middle classes employees in the public sector would suffer following the reform and the discriminative character of the reform with regard to civil servants³⁶. It should be kept in mind that middle-class public civil servants do generally consist of trade unions members. Thus, trade unions believe the government bears a negative prejudice towards state employees, as the latter are registered in trade unions and are always in the sights of the PJD's rhetorical speeches on the need to curb squandering of public finances.

The four trade unions have called for an anti-reform rally on 29 November 2015, which turned out to be a disappointment. They tried to reconvene a second time on 10 December but they did not succeed in reaching out to the masses. The traditional inability of Moroccan trade unions to assure a proper representation of the workers stems from the low number of their

³⁶ Trade unions claim that civil servants would have to take care of 50% of their retirement fund, whereas many other job categories would only have to provide 30% of the total amount.

members and their inability to provide new instruments of protection to workers employed in the informal sector or living in rural areas.

4.4 RAMED: THE LURE OF A NEW, FINANCIALLY UNSUSTAINABLE, UNIVERSAL HEALTH INSURANCE

Nizar Baraka, -former Minister of Economy and Finances and currently head of the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE), declared to the press in 2012 that, after the drafting of the new Constitution, the new governmental priorities would be the reform of major social sectors such as health, education and work³⁷.

Health and access to health-related services is generally one of the main indications of comprehensive development, listed in the HDI. Morocco still suffers from a lag in healthcare and shows some commonalities with developing countries: only 4.3% of the poorest women deliver their children with the assistance of a physician while some 70% deliver at home on their own. This leads to 130 deaths at birth on every 100,000 newborn.³⁸

Statistics systematically lie about the numbers of people left at the margins of society, but poverty, in both absolute and relative terms, is a widespread phenomenon, touching about 26.5% of the Moroccan people. Of the eight million total poor, 70% live in the rural areas, covering 80% of the national territory, which makes them remarkably disadvantaged due to the lack of public investments. Out of a population of 33 million people, more than one third – that is 32% of the population – is still left out of the two funds of health assistance and protection: the RAMED (Régime d'Assistance Médicale) and the AMO (Assurance Maladie Obligatoire de base). The first consists of the universal Health Assistance System that is a free of charge general system of health assistance; the second, the Compulsory Sickness Assistance, covers those citizens that are able to contribute regularly to the fund and in proportion to their revenues. In addition, private health funds exist.³⁹

The report of the National Agency of Sickness Insurance (Agence nationale de l'assurance maladie, ANAM) hails the current coverage of some 62% of the population as a great achievement. It evaluates positively the government's tailor-made approach to reach out to any single category of disadvantaged people, extending the RAMED to poor non-working people, providing a new student insurance covering some 280,000 students enrolled in higher education institutions and planning an Health Fund for the Self-Employed (Assurance Maladie des Indépendants, AMI), which will cover some 11 million workers.⁴⁰

The extension of the RAMED has formally guaranteed health protection to some 8.5 million people previously deprived of any assistance. However, procedures to enroll in the new health assistance coverage are long and over-bureaucratic and their completion requires a high literacy rate by the applicant. Thus, since its inception (2012) and more than three years down the line, some sources claim that RAMED has only been able to reach out to 166,000 people⁴¹: a very limited result. The Minister of Health, El Houssaine Louardi, on the other hand, declares that its success is only a matter of time. To achieve its goals, it is necessary to boost the welcoming and information services, to improve the quality of hospital administrative services

³⁷ *At-tajdid*, 6 January 2012.

³⁸ "In rural areas, this number climbs to 43% of newborn. In addition, 4% of children die below the age of 5, due to a lack of hygiene, sufficient food or health assistance." World Bank report n.50316-MA, 2010-13 Strategic Partnership Framework, pp.13-14, 2010.

³⁹ Private funds cover some 660.000 people. (2015)

⁴⁰ *La Vie Eco*, 28 December 2015, <http://lavieeco.com/news/economie/la-couverture-medicale-selargit-lassurance-retraite-demeure-faible.html>

⁴¹ *Economie Entreprise*, «Le RAMED va droit dans le mur», n.1/2016, <http://www.economie-entreprises.com/le-ramed-va-droit-dans-le-mur/>

and the access to treatments in a more transparent way. According to the Minister, however, those are all accessible targets, as they do not require substantial financial investments.⁴²

Financially speaking, the RAMED is actually subsidised by the state; 75% of its budget comes from there; 6% of its budget is funded by local authorities and 19% by relatively poor people, who earn up to 5,650 DHR (528 euros) per year and are able to devote some 120 DHR (11 euros) to health care. Originally, the extension of RAMED had to be flanked by the launch of a new National Fund of Social Cohesion aimed at raising more money both for a further extension of RAMED and for the assistance of disabled people, finally rejected by the powerful CGEM (Confédération Générale des Entrepreneurs du Maroc)⁴³. This project has thus been dropped. The powerful CGEM has declared that: "Sustainable social solidarity cannot rest only on taxing the employers, as they are the pillars of the enterprises".⁴⁴ In other words, the powerful business federation had withdrawn its support to the National Fund of Social Cohesion and the government has not yet found alternative means to fund it. Disabled people remain the main victims of this funding gap: According to a statistic drafted by the EU Meda Project, 1,530,000 – that is 5% of the population⁴⁵ –, suffer from an handicap but they are still awaiting state assistance going beyond ad-hoc and temporary projects promoted by the INDH, something extremely hard, especially for rural populations (Berrada, 2014)

To summarise, the reform of the RAMED represents a step forward in ensuring the right to health to a wider number of Moroccan citizens, but the difficulties in its implementation are linked to the persistence of a consistent mass of people living in absolute poverty (26%) or who are completely illiterate. Both conditions, though not directly linked to health, affect the new reforms put in place, which maintain a bureaucratic and non-poor-friendly approach. The question of the financial sustainability of a universal health assistance for a government incapable of collecting taxes at the local level and a sizeable part of the population equally unable to contribute to the public fund, cast a reasonable doubt on the endurance of the reform and its ability to achieve the coverage of 90% of the population by 2020⁴⁶. In addition, health has been listed as one of the regional exclusive competencies by a Consultative Commission on the Advanced Regionalisation Project, which means that it may be handed over to the Regional Directorates of Health, possibly depending on regional funds, making it even harder to achieve universal health care.

4.5 THE ADVANCED REGIONALISATION PROJECT: REAL DECENTRALISATION OR DISGUISED SOLUTION OF OTHER PROBLEMS?

The Advanced Regionalisation Project is still at ground zero. Though it has been around for many years – since 1971, and more concretely since the promulgation of the 1996 Constitution, which assigned legal personality and limited autonomous financial resources to territorial collectivities⁴⁷–, the concrete decentralisation of state powers is still struggling to

⁴² *L'Economiste*, 10 January 2012. (pag.54)

⁴³ *L'Economiste*, 22 September 2011. The Fund had to benefit from a yearly budget of 2 billion DHR and had to be sponsored by compulsory contributions of credit institutions and banks devolving to it 4,5% of their yearly revenues, plus special taxation on insurance companies' premiums and 1% taxation on the revenues of telecommunications and media companies, but it has not worked out.

⁴⁴ *Al Ahdath al Maghribia*, 15 November 2012.

⁴⁵ Berrada, 2014, pag.190

⁴⁶ El Houssaine Louardi, Minister of Health, hopes to attain the coverage 90% of the population by 2020.

⁴⁷ «16 Régions ont été créées en 1997. Pour relever les défis du développement, la Loi 47/96, promulguée en 1997, a confié de larges compétences aux Régions : propres, transférables par l'Etat et consultatives, les prédisposant à promouvoir le développement économique, social, culturel et environnemental, le cas échéant, en partenariat avec l'Etat et les autres collectivités territoriales. » Abdelkebir Berkia, « La Régionalisation au Maroc, un processus au service du développement durable du territoire », *Organization des Régions Unies, FOGAR*,

make headway. The new Project, launched under Title no.9 of the 2011 Constitution, promotes the model of a decentralised and thus more democratic Moroccan state following the democratisation process of the whole society introduced by the new Constitution. The new territorial collectivities will be directly elected by their own citizens with a bottom-up approach, with a view of making local authorities directly accountable and spur the participation of citizens in public affairs.

The cornerstone of the new regional architecture will be the Regional Council, the president of which will be elected directly and have both legislative and executive powers. It will have its own budget at its disposal and be assigned the task of outlining regional development plans. The other level of governance the prefectures and the city councils, will also be directly elected, and manage their own finances independently within the limit of their competences⁴⁸. It is formally stated that among the competences shared by state institutions and the Regional Council (following the principle of subsidiarity) there will be the social, cultural, economic and environmental development and the management of major public services and infrastructures (water distribution, energy and transports). However, the exclusive competences of the regions and local collectivities are not yet clearly defined, but are referred to as an organic law yet to be drafted.⁴⁹

Regional Councils will be supported in their work by the establishment of new bodies devoted to sustainable development: the new Regional and Council Agencies. Among them are a new Social Retraining Fund (Fonds de qualification social) and a new Inter-regional Solidarity Fund with the aim of reducing regional disparities. Finally, a new rule of periodical evaluation of public policies is introduced at all levels of governance so as to make public policies both financially accountable and target-oriented. The geographic breakdown is also innovated: 12 regions are created out of the original 16⁵⁰. The new political geography is inspired by criteria of good governance and institutional proximity to citizens at the local level.

The current Minister of Finances and the Economy, Mohamed Boussaid, has proclaimed: “2016 will be the year of the draft of all organic laws to implement the Advanced Regionalisation Project” relying on those new important financial resources⁵¹, plus the Social Retraining Fund and the new Interregional Solidarity Fund. The government considers that the introduction of the new Interregional Solidarity Fund – consisting of an amount yet to be decided, but somewhere between 128 and 215 billion DHR⁵²– would be pivotal to the success of the whole project, as most of the regions lag behind national and international standards in the fields of education, health and road infrastructures. Finally, most of the regions do not have their own resources as they have little or no experience in collecting taxes at the local or regional level.

Yet the urgency felt around the Advanced Regionalisation Project responds more to a diplomatic pressure than a national or a 20 February Movement request. In fact, the palace wants to broker a tailor-made and top-down solution of the Saharawi issue. This was made clear by the last royal address to the nation, the “Speech of the Throne”, delivered on

<http://www.regionsunies-fogar.org/fr/devenir-membre/articles-d-opinion/78-la-regionalisation-un-processus-au-service-du-developpement-durable-du-territoire>, 2011.

⁴⁸ According to the organic laws no. 111-14, 112-14 and 113-14.

⁴⁹ Among the exclusive competences of the regions will be local development, local administration and justice, local taxation, local services including transports, economic policies for drawing investments, local public housing and local social and community services.

⁵⁰ The new regions are: Tanger-Tétouan, Oriental et Rif, Fès-Meknès, Rabat-Salé-Kénitra, Béni Mellal-Khénifra, Casablanca-Settat, Marrakech-Safi, Drâa-Tafilalet, Souss-Massa, Guelmim-Oued Noun, Laâyoune-Saguia al Hamra et Ed-Dakhla-Oued ed Dahab.

⁵¹ 4 billion DHR (some 360 billion euros) have been allocated to the project by the new finance law (2016).

⁵² Between 114 billion and 196 billion euros.

6 November 2015, during which King Mohammed VI stated that according to the new Advanced Regionalisation Plan the people of the South (the Sahrawis) will be given “self-governing power and will then have to face their own responsibilities”. This means that they will be held fully accountable for assuring local development and social cohesion⁵³.

The king furthermore stated that Morocco has kept its promises (to the international community), but it has also drawn a final line, one which it will not trespass. Therefore, the royal speech, despite its conciliatory tones, aimed at issuing a warning to opponents both in and outside of the country that Morocco now considers the Sahrawi question as dealt with and will not tolerate other critiques on the subject. It seems that rather than responding to domestic pressures, the Project of Advanced Regionalisation is a token exchange by the monarchy with the international community. In view of the moderate pressures exerted on the monarchy by both the EU and the US, particularly in the aftermath of the 2010 Gdeim Izik protests' disbandment⁵⁴, the Makhzen had to come up with a new plan to deflect international attention from the Sahrawi issue. It is no coincidence that, even before the launching of a new Constitution, the king had already appointed a Sahrawi instead of a Moroccan as governor of El 'Ayoun in 2010 (Bennani, 2012). The new constitutional text then officially acknowledged the 'Hassani language' – the Sahrawi dialect, together with a standard version of the Tamazigh – for the first time. The Advanced Regionalisation, so intended, would mean a gradual and restrained recognition of cultural diversity within the kingdom, but, above all, within the limits set by the Makhzen.

4.6 THE STATE'S UNCONVINCING COMMITMENT TO FIGHTING CORRUPTION

The fight against corruption – a major issue raised in 2011 by both the palace and the Benkirane since 2007 – seems no longer a priority. Corruption had been brought to the fore by the PJD during the revolts of 2011 as one of the dossiers and concerns the party shared with demonstrators. The PM had defined corruption as a “national disease” after a discouraging report of the ONG Transparency Morocco was published in 2012, rating the country 88th out of 176 in terms of corruption. The government has thus launched a major anti-corruption campaign and proclaimed a national day of the fight against corruption on 6 January as a symbolic patriotic engagement of all Moroccan people and institutions. Benkirane, in fact, even declared in 2012 that there was a “momentum for fighting against the prevarication and exploiters of public goods and their criminal indictment”, following the prosecution of some key officials and executives (Bensouda, 141). However, since then, the fight has lost its momentum and the number of people indicted has rapidly decreased. Four years later, corruption does not make the headlines anymore, despite the meager achievements.

Evidence of this are the many decisions taken by both the palace and the government. Regarding the first, it has not deemed urgent to make substantial changes at constitutional level. To provide a few examples, the procedure of appointment of the head of the Court of Auditors, one of the key commissions in charge of monitoring all state institutions' expenditures, remains the same under the new Constitution, while the newly established

⁵³«Régionalisation avancée: "Il est prévu de mettre au point des contrats-programmes entre l'Etat et les Régions" (discours royal) », *AtlasInfo.fr*, 6 nov. 2015, http://www.atlasinfo.fr/Regionalisation-avancee-Il-est-prevu-de-mettre-au-point-des-contrats-programmes-entre-l-Etat-et-les-Regions-discours_a66553.html

⁵⁴ From 9 October to 8 November 2010 the people of Sahrawi set up a tent movement in the desert close to El 'Ayoun (Gdeim Ezik), the biggest city of the Sahrawi region. The protest gathered some 20,000 people but was violently disbanded by Moroccan auxiliary forces and police officers on November 8. In the clash that occurred, 11 Moroccans and 4 Sahrawis died. Many Sahrawis were then arrested and sentenced by military courts in 2013 (Al Jazeera, 2013).

Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) does not deal with corruption. Of all the new institutions of control of finances and the fight against corruption established by the new Constitution – the Competition Council, the Instance to Fight Against Corruption, the Ombudsman Instance and the National Instance for the Protection of Public Goods – none has yet entered into force, as they are all awaiting the implementation rules governing their activities. It is not yet clear whether, once in place, their recommendations will have binding force or will be limited to an advisory role. Finally, on the one hand, the ultimate institution in charge of the fight against corruption, the Central Instance for the Prevention of Corruption (ICPC) established by art. 167, has not been very active in the past two years. Its campaigns are limited to awareness raising, even resorting to the use of tools such as comics and stripes to educate citizens, and are of little added value in denouncing corruption. On the other hand, the Minister of Justice, Mustapha Ramid, defends his own work by saying that many more people than before have been brought to justice and that the government has taken an unexpected initiative in advertising a list of beneficiaries of public concessions and authorisations in many important economic domains, such as transports and quarries⁵⁵.

On 28 December 2015, the new “national strategy for the fight against corruption” has been officially adopted but, as Transparency International Morocco highlights, the new strategy is still at a roadmap stage. It is too early to assess its effectiveness, as much will depend on its implementation. However, the fact that it has already taken four years to adopt a simple roadmap addressing one of the most prominent requests put forward in 2011 by demonstrators does not bode well for the credibility of the government and the palace’s intentions. Moreover, despite its repetitive and declamatory claims to fight corruption, it is not regressing. Therefore, the main cause can only be identified as the result of a set of contradictory inputs, major bureaucratic and political hindrances and structural lack of skills.

A point well summarised by Maghraoui (2012)⁵⁶: “There is no doubt that part of the explanation lies in governance issues. First, there is the problem of the judicial system. It lacks independence, the judges are corrupt (...) Second, the bureaucracy seems immune to anti-corruption measures (...) Third, there are problems with the auditing bodies. Fourth, there is a general gap between reforms and application. Finally, there is the lack of a coherent strategy”. A quite bitter note to conclude with.

5 CONCLUSIONS: A LOT OF LIP SERVICE, BUT LITTLE IMPROVEMENT AND AN OVERALL HINDERED DEMOCRACY

Analysing the post-2011 improvements in socio-economic rights in Morocco leaves us with a blurred and contradictory image. On the one hand, fundamental provisions on the protection of socio-economic rights are enshrined in the new Constitution, thus obliging state institutions to an active engagement to fulfil their commitment. On the other hand, major shortcomings and loopholes are visible, together with a weakening of the urgency to reform, not only at the legislative level, but also in terms of the political will to implement the new Constitution.

Concerning institutional and power arrangements, key prerogatives continue to be removed from and the Moroccan citizens in favour of the monarchy, resulting in a slowing down of reforms and less accountable elected institutions in terms of political and economic choices.

⁵⁵ *Huffington Post Maghreb*, 22/12/2014, http://www.huffpostmaghreb.com/2015/07/17/corruption-maroc-concours-caricatures_n_7812222.html

⁵⁶ Abdeslam Maghraoui, *The Perverse Effect of Good Governance: Lessons from Morocco*, *Middle East Policy Council*, Summer 2012, vol. XIX, no. 2, <http://www.mepec.org/journal/middle-east-policy-archives/perverse-effect-good-governance-lessons-morocco?print>

If almost no political movement or party is able to publicly raise the issue, there are at least a few political outsiders (AMDH, 'ADl wa al-Ihsane, An-Nahj ad-dimocrati) campaigning to remind Moroccan citizens that the core issue of democratic power still are unaddressed.

Looking at the labour market, the promises of the post-Arab Spring governments to create more jobs and fight against corruption have not been honoured. The number of jobs created yearly still lags behind the number of applicants, and precarious and informal jobs employing people with little or no qualification are still the rule. Even tough small steps forward have been realised with regard to the increase of the minimum salary and the allocation of limited unemployment benefits, the wider call for qualified or at least decent labour remains unheard.

On education, the pledge to reform and modernise the whole system seems to result in a binary system composed of low-quality public schools and high-quality private ones. This is likely to reproduce existing social inequalities, rather than help reduce the rural-urban divide, foster the fight against illiteracy and boost social mobility. Moreover, the debate on reforming the university system is even more inconsistent, projecting an ideological agenda of the party in power, disregarding the basic social right to a good and valuable education.

Regarding the European-inspired reform of the Retirement Fund, which was socially costly but unavoidable, the choice to start reforming the oversized public sector has been justified by studies assessing the unsustainability of the current system.

With regard to the right to health and health protection, the government is surely concentrating its efforts into raising the national standards by means of public insurance targeting different social groups with tailor-made policies and reaching out to the maximum number of citizens. It is still too early to assess the implementation of these policies but much will depend on the capability to secure stable and permanent funds to the RAMED. In fact, the new system of universal coverage hardly appears sustainable in the long run.

Finally, the Advanced Regionalisation project has yet to take shape and much of its success or its failure will depend on the implementation laws awaited in 2016. It is fundamental to keep in mind that a process of progressive decentralisation has been left in abeyance for years and that at least three reforms have been passed that have achieved little so far. Moreover, the main trigger for the current reform is responding to the external pressure of granting more rights and representation to the Sahrawi citizens, up to the same level as the other minorities and ethnic components making up the Moroccan society, maybe one of the few undisputable social and cultural acquisitions in the wake of the Arab Springs.

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ⁱ I would like to thank Prof. Maati Monjiib for his comments and remarks on this brief.

