PEACE ON CLIMATE

Policy Incoherence over Climate Adaptation in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia

Governance and the policy effectiveness of today will dictate the extent to which countries are able to absorb and adapt to the climate effects of tomorrow.

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This essay seeks to explore the issue of policy incoherence as a factor that hinders climate-related development. Yet, a comparison of climate-related governance in the Maghreb region, through the case studies of Morocco, Tunisia and Algeria, will demonstrate the major difficulties involved in establishing consistent and effective climate policies. This analysis will provide insights into how/where the existing climate adaptation strategies must be improved from a policy and governance perspective.

Firstly, the competing demands for scarce water represent a major source of tension in the Maghreb region. These competing demands are precisely caused by the incoherence that most policies, e.g. in the agriculture, tourism, climate change adaptation sectors, require intensive water usage. Morocco has recently introduced a new agricultural development plan, "Generation Green 2020-2030", and a country-wide forestation plan, "Forêts du Maroc". However, although these plans have the positive ambition to mobilize young people and thus to expand the country's middle class, it is unclear whether they will effectively address the issue of having to share already scarce water resources and arable land (Hervè 2020). For example, the launch of the Moroccan Ouarzazate solar power plant in 2016 was fervently criticized as the plant requires large amounts of water for cooling and cleaning whilst surrounding villages struggle to access drinking water (Hamouchene, 2020). This controversy led to the so-called "thirst protests" of 2017.

Unfortunately, the problem of scarce water is doomed to become especially problematic in the context of increasing climate change challenges (Desmidt, 24).Tunisia has also witnessed "thirst revolutions" due to government mismanagement of water supplies further depleting already scarce resources (Desmidt, 20-21). It was reported, in 2015, that "5 billion cubic meters of water flow into the sea every year that could be diverted for farming and residential use, and that 30% of water in reservoirs is lost because of leaks in damaged pipes" (Al Arabiya 2016). In Algeria, the government initiated shale gas fracking which risks polluting water. Hence, while the Moroccan, Tunisian and Algerian governments are demonstrating attempts to invest in green energy transition, there are considerable contradictions in the policies. These undermine the potential positive effects of the very same policies.

Generally, the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy must occur through effective government planning in order to avoid frustrations and security risks. Of all three countries, Morocco stands out for its large investments in solar power. However, experts have raised questions as to whether these investments work through premeditated policies and long-term projects which consider the impact of renewable energy on resources and communities (Desmidt, 24). In fact, the construction of the Ouarzazate power plant, which required the re-allocation of communal lands previously owned by small-scale herders and farmers, ignited strong feelings of resentment and frustration (Hamouchene, 2020).

Throughout the years, political discontent and "contradictions between political and economic policy choices and the environment"– thus a weak "climate governance" – have led to increasing social protests holding an environmental purpose in Morocco, Algeria and Tunisia (Desmidt, 25). Most significant were the Algerian protests in 2014, against the permission given by the government for the French company Total to conduct tests on "unconventional fracking techniques, previously outlawed in France"(Crisis Group 2016).With ever increasing climate impacts, there will be a more urgent need to address the contradictions and incoherences of government policies and to formulate more effective climate adaptation strategies.

Furthermore, the climate adaptation policies of the selected countries face drawbacks at the regional level. Indeed, there is a lack of cooperation and dialogue amongst them. This hinders their ability to deal most effectively with the "cascading climate risks". According to expert Sophie Desmidt, the political relation between Morocco and Algeria is one marked by competition rather than cooperation, which extends to their climate adaptation strategies (Desmidt, 28). For example, competition pertaining to the access of sub-Saharan Africa's energy markets and the export of hydrocarbon and gas to West Africa (Desmidt, 28). Morocco also aspires to create a new market of exporting renewable energy to both West and East Africa. Overall, the lack of regional cooperation undermines the countries' ability to hamper climate change and related security risks. This is a reproachful situation considering that, as de Coning and Krampe note, there are examples of how "multilateral cooperation at sub regional levels, particularly if amplified by the AU and UN levels, can contribute to preventing, mitigating and adapting to climate change" (Desmidt, 28).

Meanwhile, at the international level, it is important to analyse the significant role of the European Union in shaping the Maghreb countries' climate adaptation policies. Experts such as James Mackie assert that the EU should consider the implications of its policies beyond its borders(Mackie). The economic and energy interdependence between the two regions signifies that they are inherently vulnerable to each other's domestic and foreign policies. For example, as Europe distances itself from hydrocarbon, Algeria's economy is likely to suffer greatly due to a lack of economic diversification from the oil and gas exporting market (Desmidt, 33). This would lead to economic issues and possibly greater social/environmental protests.

Additionally - with the exception of Algeria in that it is not producing much renewable energy - North Africa faces the negative effects of producing renewable energy without even consuming it! It is exported to the EU. The downsides of producing renewable energy (e.g. the overuse of already scarce resources)are thus "externalized onto North Africa" (Desmidt, 33). For example, the solar power produced from the Tunur Solar Project in Tunisia is sold at low-cost to Western Europe, although much needed domestically (Hamouchene, 2020). Considering that it is predicted that the majority of renewable energy in European markets will continue to be produced in North Africa, especially hydrogen production, the EU, as part of its Green Deal and the new EU Adaptation Strategy, must consider the cross-border "cascading risks" of its climate adaptation strategies (Desmidt, 33).

Overall, policy incoherence, whereby policies in one sector (e.g. rural development, natural resource management) contradict/counteract policies in another sector (e.g. security, energy policy), risks undermining their very effectiveness. Policy coherence is a long-term political and balancing effort which must be built upon today (Mackie). Countries' "adaptive capacities" to climate change reflect their governance strategies. Today's governance and policy effectiveness will determine the extent to which countries are able to absorb and adapt to tomorrow's climate effects.

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