

# Western Sahara: why is Spain opposed to Morocco?



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## ► What is Spain's position on the question of the independence of Western Sahara?

*"Spain does not support the independence of Western Sahara but wants a correct decolonization framed by the United Nations"*, summarizes Khadija Mohsen-Finan, teacher-researcher at the University of Paris 1 and specialist in Western Sahara. This intermediate position stems from the history linking the Spanish kingdom and this territory. Colonial power in the region from 1884 to 1975, Spain did not respect the rules imposed by international law at the time of decolonization. It did not proceed to the self-determination referendum of the Saharawi people for which it was mandated by the UN, leaving Morocco and Mauritania to annex the territory.

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Today, Spain's intermediate position on the Sahrawi question poisons relations with its Moroccan neighbor. As the latest events in Ceuta and Melilla demonstrate, the Shereefian kingdom does not hesitate to use migratory pressure as a diplomatic weapon against a Spain that it considers pro-Sahrawi.

*"For Morocco, either you are their ally and you recognize that Western Sahara belongs to the country, or you are hostile, explains Khadija Mohsen-Finan. There can be no middle ground on this issue. "*

## ► Why does Spain not side with Morocco?

As a result of this failed decolonization, Spain and Western Sahara have kept a special relationship. *"Spain keeps a feeling of guilt"*, indicates the teacher. Public opinion is in favor of the

independence of the former colony, a parameter that Morocco hardly takes into consideration.

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Spain defends a resolution of the Saharawi question according to the rules dictated by international law under the aegis of the United Nations. This posture prevents him from recognizing that the region belongs to Morocco. *“When the United States recognized the Moroccan character of Western Sahara in exchange for the normalization of relations between Morocco and Israel, Spain did not follow “*, recalls the researcher.

## ► Why does the relationship between Spain and Algeria influence Spain's position?

The relationship between Spain and Algeria also weighs in this issue. Algeria constitutes the main support for the Saharawi separatists of the Polisario Front. The admission of Brahim Ghali, leader of the separatists, in a Spanish hospital on April 18 was also the result of a request made by the Algerian leaders.

Madrid avoids falling out with Algeria because the two countries are important economic partners. *“The Algerian gas supply is very important”*, observes Khadija Mohsen-Finan. Since 2011, the Medgaz gas pipeline has directly linked the Algerian installations of Béni Saf to the port of Almeria in Andalusia and 60% of the gas passing through it is intended for the Spanish market. However, the concession granted by Algeria to the Spanish company Naturgy expires in October 2021.