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**Development Implications of
Morocco's Membership of the
Economic Community of West
African States (ECOWAS)**

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Abstract

The membership application of Morocco to the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in February 2017; one month after returning to the African Union (AU) following over three decades, has continued to generate arguments. This study adopted the expository design to appraise the development implications, for Nigeria particularly and West Africa in general, of Morocco's membership of ECOWAS. The study confirmed that Morocco's membership in ECOWAS would pose a significant challenge to the influence of Nigeria in the bloc. It concluded that Morocco's membership of ECOWAS would not only be unique but may translate to increased development in the sub-region. The study however recommended that while ECOWAS should not be in a hurry to accept Morocco's membership, Morocco, for the time being, should focus on its involvement with the AU, work to revive the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU), while maintaining already established economic ties with West African states.

Key Words: Membership, Development, ECOWAS, Arab Maghreb Union, Morocco

Introduction

The Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) is a regional organization established via the Lagos Treaty signed on May 28, 1975 (ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993), and located in the West African sub-region; precisely headquartered in Abuja, Nigeria. At inception, the membership of the community included fifteen (15) West African countries, namely: Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, The Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea- Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra Leone, and Togo. Mauritania eventually withdrew membership and was

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replaced by Cape Verde. (Ajulo, 1989; Akinbobola, 2008; Abati, 2018; Touré, nd).

Article 3(1) of the ECOWAS treaty (ECOWAS Revised Treaty, 1993) states the organization's objectives as:

...to promote co-operation and integration, leading to the establishment of an economic union in West Africa in order to raise the living standards of its peoples, and to maintain and enhance economic stability, foster relations among Member States and contribute to the progress and development of the African Continent.

The implication of the above is that the economic community is tasked with creating economic integration primarily across the West Africa region, and to contribute to economic development of Africa at large. Igrouane (2017) noted that ECOWAS aims to promote economic sufficiency for each member state and collectively as a bloc. This, the organization aims to achieve, by creating an economic cooperation in the West African sub-region which will enhance inter-state trading and collective economic growth.

Following this backdrop, the King of Morocco, King Mohammed VI on June 4, 2017 at the 51st Summit of ECOWAS held in Monrovia, formally requested that his Kingdom be accepted as an official member of the ECOWAS. This request came two months after the Kingdom of Morocco was readmitted as a member of the African Union (AU) (Pine, 2018; Byiers and Abderrahim, 2018). Morocco, as a Kingdom, is among the countries located in North Africa. It is important to note that Africa, as a continent, is divided into 5 geo-political sub-regions according to their geographical locations. This division into geo-political regions was conducted during an Ordinary Session of the then Organization of African Unity. Africa has five geo-political regions: Northern, Western, Central, Eastern and Southern Africa, as divided by the Council of Ministers of the Organisation of African Unity (OAU) (now African Union (AU) at an Ordinary Session in Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, from February 23 to March 1, 1976, by Resolution No. CM/Res.464 (XXVI) (Okoronkwo, 2017). These geo-political regions

are otherwise known as Regional Economic Communities (REC), and each economic community, signed the Protocol of Relations between the African Economic Community (ECA) and the RECs on February 25, 1998 (Touré, n.d). The North African sub-region comprises five states, namely: Egypt, Libya, Tunisia, Algeria, Morocco and the territory of Western Sahara (Uchendu, 2015).

Considering the fact that the Kingdom of Morocco does not belong to the West African region, the request of the North African state to join ECOWAS has been shrouded in a lot of controversy. While some see the move as a welcome development, suggesting that it could enhance social and economic relations between the North and the West and the rest of Africa (Igrouane, 2017; Abati, 2018), others opined that it is illegal for a North African country to be part of a West African regional community. Those who hold the contrary viewpoint argue that such a move could erode the objectives and identity of ECOWAS, and undermine the influence and power of Nigeria in ECOWAS following the country's status as a major voice in the region (Falana, 2017; Touré, n.d. and Oguh, 2017).

Using system theory, this paper examines the quest for development and the membership of Morocco in ECOWAS. What this membership portends for West Africa and Nigeria as a major stakeholder in ECOWAS, as well as the African continent at large. It contributes to knowledge by assessing how a suspicion-free relationship can be established and maintained between the ECOWAS and Morocco.

The next section of the paper is an interrogation of the arguments for and against the Kingdom of Morocco's bid to be a member of the ECOWAS. It is followed by the analysis of the effects this membership could have on ECOWAS as a system (as an organization) itself, and, or as a sub-system (unit) of Africa under the African Union (AU), and Nigeria (a sub-sub system or unit of ECOWAS) as an economic power in the region. The paper then assesses the options that exist for healthy relationship between ECOWAS and Morocco that could be favorable and developmental to both Parties and Africa as a whole.

Appraising Arguments for and Against Morocco's ECOWAS Membership Bid

Some supporters of Morocco's membership interest in ECOWAS are of the opinion that the Western regional organization and the Northern Country's relations will foster inter-connectivity between the regions. And it will also boost economic prosperity in Africa. In the words of Abati, (2018):

Economic and political considerations should override geography that is merely nomenclatural, particularly if the applicant-countries are within Africa. Opening up ECOWAS beyond geographical boundaries would be more in keeping with the long-term goal of the AU, which is the creation of an African Economic Community (AEC) that promotes the integration and cooperation of the various regional blocs in the continent. Incidentally, this is the growing global trend. For example, Egypt, Tunisia and Libya are members of the Common Market of Eastern and Southern African States (COMESA). Algeria has also submitted its accession applications to this economic body (para. 10).

The implication is that if ECOWAS accepts Morocco's membership bid, it will not be the first regional organization to accept a member that does not belong to its region. In addition, economic and political development should be paramount in the adoption of members and not their geographical location. To further stress this point, Pine, (2018, para. 1) observed that Morocco's intention is borne out of its desire "...to foster continental integration and understanding and for ECOWAS" particularly "to crown the strong political, human, historical, religious and economic ties at all levels with ECOWAS member countries." Morocco's membership is observed as an avenue to expand the reach and influence of the ECOWAS beyond the West African region.

Nigeria's Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr. Geoffrey Onyema supporting Morocco's bid to join the ECOWAS, explained that Morocco's membership could translate to developmental win-win situation for both Morocco and

ECOWAS. According to Anumba-Khaleel, (2017):

Onyema argued that although the ECOWAS Treaty was clear on which country could join the bloc, the Heads of State of the member-nations could choose to “modify” it to allow Morocco access into the group. The reality is that trade with Morocco has been increasing, both with ECOWAS and Nigeria. So, we are looking at more trade, which will be a win-win for us. Is Morocco a Trojan-Horse for the EU? There are laws and rules in international trade that prevent dumping of goods or easy access to other markets. It is not something that will happen easily that the EU will dump goods here... (para. 25-27)

Onyema was advocating for Morocco’s membership to be considered because of potential developmental gains it could mean for all member states and ECOWAS. And rules guiding international trade would not allow any country to be easily turned to a dumping ground for European goods.

Igrouane (2017 para. 16), stated that Morocco’s interest in the membership of the ECOWAS is as a result of “difficult” status quo being currently faced by the North African state under the umbrella of their regional organization, the Maghreb Arab Union. He suggested that joining the ECOWAS is a step towards Morocco’s domination in Africa. In his words; “If Morocco wants to be strong and a leader in Africa, it should become part of [the continent’s] communities,” “... its request to join ECOWAS is a future preparation to join other communities.” Also, Mounia Boucetta, the Secretary of State to the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation of Morocco, as cited by Byiers and Abderrahim, (2018, para. 12) noted that Morocco’s “...bid to join ECOWAS is “a strategic decision with strong political and economic dimensions” and “in no way reflects a desire to topple the power of any state.” This point was made in order to avert fear from current ECOWAS members who were skeptical about the true intentions of Morocco for wanting to join the ECOWAS. It is meant to be a pure political and economic developmental move, expected to be

mutually beneficial to all parties.

However, Falana (2017), in arguing against the request of Morocco opined that it is legally wrong for the Kingdom of Morocco to join the West African community. This is because the revised treaty of the ECOWAS does not allow for such membership. He added:

Before the submission of Morocco's request for membership of ECOWAS, Nigeria and some member states of the economic grouping had raised serious objections to the "EU-ECOWAS Partnership Agreement" designed to allow the industrialised members of the European Union to flood West Africa with manufactured goods and thereby destroy the infantile industries in the member states of ECOWAS. If Morocco is admitted to ECOWAS the European Union would have achieved its objective as it has signed an Association Agreement with Morocco which is similar to the EU-ECOWAS Partnership Agreement in every material particular. In other words, if the request is granted, Morocco will take advantage of the ECOWAS Protocol on Free Movement of people and goods to serve as a gateway for EU goods entering into West Africa and thereby defeat the principal objectives of the ECOWAS (para. 4).

Supporting this stand by Falana, Pine, (2018, para. 3) argued that, "Morocco, located in North Africa is ..., geographically and legally speaking, not qualified to be a member of ECOWAS. In the forty-two years of the existence of ECOWAS this is the first time a non-West African country is applying for membership." The motive behind this desire is therefore questionable (Pine, 2018). This questionable desire of Morocco can be further established with the fact that it has spent most of the last thirty years strengthening relationship with Europe at the expense of Africa (I-ARB Africa, 2018). I-ARB Africa, (2018) also observed that Morocco could be hoping to benefit from the economic strength of West Africa which has a population of about 335 million, GDP of \$345 billion, and with it established bilateral

relations with almost all the 15 countries of the ECOWAS. It could be said that Morocco is looking to extend its reach and influence in West Africa by wanting to be part of the ECOWAS.

Prof. Amadu Sesay, Prof. Fred Agwu, Prof. Charles Dokubo and Prof. Alaba Ogunsanwo, among others, at a seminar organized by the Nigerian Institute of International Affairs (NIIA), in Lagos on the December 6, 2017, entitled: "The ECOWAS and Morocco's quest for Membership: What Implications?" opined that Morocco's membership in ECOWAS could adversely affect democratic consolidation in the West Africa sub-region, while also reawakening the divide between Francophone and Anglophone states in the sub-region. Additionally, Morocco might be the ruin of ECOWAS considering its record of contributing to the destruction of most of the organizations it belongs (Gbonegun, 2017). Gbonegun, (2017) suggested that Morocco's bid is as a result of the crisis in the Arab region, and if it is allowed official membership it could bring about such crisis among members of ECOWAS. He concluded by saying; "...Morocco's attempt to join ECOWAS is to expand its base, trade, influence and opportunities since ECOWAS is more attractive." (Gbonegun, 2017, para. 9). This could topple the status quo of the West African Economic Community.

ECOWAS' Membership: The System Theoretical Perspective

The System Theory was propounded by a biologist Ludwig von Bertalanffy (1901-1972) (Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, 1997; Olaniyi, 2005; Adams, et al, 2013), and was introduced to political science through the works of David Easton. He published "The Political System" in 1953 with the aim of developing a theory that could be useful across the social sciences (Olaniyi, 2005).

According to Gusau, (2013), "the system theory or approach to the study of integration regarded the nation state as sole actors in the international system and always in interaction with each other in order to make the region, continent or the whole world an organized complexity" (p. 167).

In other words, a system is as good, effective and orderly as the level of co-operation and interaction between and among its units or parts, and a system could exist at a regional level like the ECOWAS, a continental level like the AU, or at a global level like the United Nations (UN). Thus, the system theory can arguably be used to explain or analyze Morocco's bid for ECOWAS' membership, ECOWAS in this case, being a system whose parts or units comprises West African states.

Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff (1997) suggested that "a whole which functions as a whole by virtue of the interdependence of its parts is called a system, and the method which aims at discovering how this is brought about in the widest variety of systems has been called general systems theory" (p. 17). This point is supporting the fact that co-operation and inter-dependency needs to exist among parts for a system to be functional. Therefore, it can be said that ECOWAS as a system is operating by virtue of the interdependence and co-operation existing among its member states, the lack of which could bring about a breakdown of the system. However, it is important to note that every part or unit is important as such, the action or inaction of one affects the others and the system as a whole (Mahajan, 2008).

Each of ECOWAS' member states is an individual political system on its own, and, the ECOWAS as a system is an integration of sub-systems. As Dougherty and Pfaltzgraff, (1997) clearly noted, a system that exists within a system is referred to as a subsystem, usually, common, features, orientations and goals are shared by subsystems that belong to the same system, their similar attributes enhances their cordial relationship as members of a whole. Article 4 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty specifically stated: "(a) equality and inter-dependence of Member States; (b) solidarity and collective self-reliance; (c) inter-State co-operation, harmonisation of policies and integration of programmes" (ECOWAS, 1993) as parts of the fundamental principle of the organization and these are important elements of a working system.

David Easton noted that a system must have three elements: parts; these parts must be related to one another and to the system; the second is

called the structure; the kind of relationship that exists among the parts; and finally function; the contribution of each part towards the survival of the system. He further explained that system theory preaches harmony as against conflicts, integration and not competition, relationship, interdependency and equilibrium as opposed to shifting alliances. In other words, the uniting member states of a system should not be suspicious of each other (Olaniyi, 2005).

Morocco's ECOWAS Membership and Developmental Prospects for Africa and West African States

The implication of Morocco's ECOWAS membership can be viewed as good or bad depending on the observer's perspective. For most supporters of this bid, it is a welcome development that could expand the horizon of ECOWAS. However, those against it are mostly of the opinion that the bid is solely meant to benefit Morocco, the North African Country to the detriment of the West African sub-region. In West Africa, Nigerian trade unions, business investors, some former diplomats and other stakeholders seem to be the arrow heads opposing the Morocco's bid for ECOWAS (Abati, 2018).

When discussing emerging issues on Nigeria's foreign policy, Amb. Oladapo Fafowora, the National President of the Association of Retired Career Ambassadors of Nigeria (ARCAN), said Morocco's bid was due to its wish to extend its industrial export which mostly comes from EU, specifically France, to the larger market in West Africa (Adekunle, 2018). This shows that the primary interest of Morocco's bid is its national economic development, and Nigeria, with its \$333 billion economy according to its 2016 GDP, is regarded as the "gateway to the West African region". Nigeria, with this economic power in West Africa, Michel Arrion, a European Union Ambassador to Nigeria and West Africa, opined that Nigeria should guide the economy of the region as it is an extension of its economy. Morocco with a GDP of \$110 billion, if admitted to ECOWAS will significantly fetter Nigeria's position as an economic powerhouse in

the region (Oguh, 2017), and in the words of Oguh, (2017), “The North African country will immediately become the second largest economy in the region, way ahead of Cote d’Ivoire (GDP of \$34 billion), Ghana (GDP of \$30 billion), and Senegal (GDP of \$19 billion)” (para. 4&5).

The points above imply that Nigeria may lose its position as a major player in the regional body if it allows Morocco’s membership of ECOWAS to sail through, and Morocco’s membership could be detrimental to Nigeria’s economic development. According to Ogundipe (2017), while citing Fashina, (nd), the convener of “The Nigerian Movement for the Liberation of Western Sahara,” indicated that Morocco’s move to join the ECOWAS is a calculated plan to reduce the reach and might of Nigeria and her efforts in the sub-region. As such, the country should take the challenge seriously so as not to lose its place in West Africa and in Africa as a whole. Ogundipe (2017) further stated that Prof. Bolaji Akinyemi, a political scientist, and a former Minister of External Affairs of Nigeria, described Morocco’s attempt to join ECOWAS as the most serious insult to Nigeria’s foreign policy dominance since the Civil War. Supporting this stand, John Shinkanye, the chairman of the Association of Retired Career Ambassadors of Nigeria (ARCAN) opined that if Morocco’s move sails through; “it would be one of the most humiliating moments of our country’s foreign policy since independence” (Anumba-Khaleel, 2017, para. 7). Thus, the implication of Morocco’s membership in ECOWAS will be dire for Nigeria if this move is not vehemently opposed.

On the security implication of Morocco’s bid, John Shinkanye, posited that: “the admission of Morocco will pose serious challenges to peace and security and will particularly affect the current regional efforts to fight and defeat terrorism ...” (Anumba-Khaleel, 2017, para. 7). He further stated that “...free movement of people, goods and services will further open up the corridor between North and West Africa to the proliferation of small arms and light weapons, human trafficking, increased nefarious activities of terrorists and other non-state actors.” (Anumba-Khaleel, 2017, para. 7). Without the free movement of goods and services enjoyed in West Africa by members states of ECOWAS extended to Morocco, states

in the West African sub-region especially Nigeria have been confronting human trafficking, illegal migration and security challenges; the Boko Haram insurgency. Allowing Morocco to enjoy the benefits of being a West African country while in the North could make these challenges worse. As stated by Hassan, (2017), "...there are reports that ISIS is recruiting in large numbers in Morocco. ECOWAS's free movement protocol would make it easy for recruits to travel within West Africa, posing a huge security risk to a region that is already battling Islamic militancy and Boko Haram" (para. 8). All these are pointing to likely increase in insecurity in the West Africa sub-region if Morocco becomes a member of the ECOWAS, and development in such a situation will be a herculean task.

Morocco, as a non-signatory to the African Charter on Human and People's Rights, means that citizens of ECOWAS member states enjoying the Free Movement of Persons, Residence and Establishment, under article 2 of ECOWAS Protocol A/P.1/5/79, could find their rights trampled upon in Morocco (PLAC, 2017). Under this article, ECOWAS 'citizens', could move, live and establish freely in any ECOWAS member States' territory (ECOWAS, 1993).

Additionally, the integration of a North African Kingdom into the West African regional organization could mean an end to the name and identity of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). As membership of the regional organization would have gone beyond the West, thus it would no longer be strictly a West African Community. Anumba-Khaleel, (2017, para. 13&14) while citing Femi Falana opined; a North African state in a West African organization will lead to a change of name and organs of operation of the organization. Also, Nigeria has fervently been against the EU striking Economic Partnership Agreement (EPA) with ECOWAS; however, with Morocco's economic strength and cordial relationship with the European Union (EU), EPA may become a reality, thereby flooding the sub region with European goods, and cause increment in unemployment. With this, Nigeria's economy, making up 70 percent of West Africa's economy will be subverted and Morocco could become the economic power (Anumba-Khaleel, 2017). By and large, the

kingdom of Morocco stand to gain more from this proposed association than any other party involved. To emphasize this, the Economist, (2017, para. 3), suggested that:

Membership...stands to benefit Moroccan companies operating in the region, as it will ease the flow of goods between Morocco and ECOWAS states and reduce trade costs. According to estimates from the African Development Bank, the regional policy (which halves customs duties for intra-ECOWAS trade) could generate a 5% increase in Moroccan exports to this region. In the long term, this would help to diversify and expand Morocco's export markets.

This indicates that Morocco will be using the West African region to improve its economic lot; however, this could also mean bettering the economic stand of the African continent as a member of the African Union (AU) (newly readmitted after 33 years of absence).

It is important to note that although most of the objections towards Morocco's membership of ECOWAS are majorly from Nigerian stakeholders, the relationship between Nigeria and Morocco has not always been unfriendly. For one, Nigeria supported Morocco's readmission into the African Union (AU), Morocco also invested in a fertilizer production plant in Nigeria, with the aim to promoting its revenue generation from Agricultural sector and downscale Nigeria's dependence on oil (Tagba, 2017). Additionally, Tagba, (2017, para. 5) stated that "The two countries have also agreed to build a gas pipeline that will channel Nigerian gas along the West African coast all the way to Morocco and eventually into Europe. Nigeria is also looking forward to benefiting from Morocco's experience in renewable energies, tourism, infrastructure and rural development." It could however be said that with the current relationship between Nigeria and Morocco, both countries can enjoy even more economic partnership under the umbrella body of the ECOWAS. ECOWAS membership could foster closer interdependence and relationship between Morocco and Nigeria, which could lead to economic prosperity for both, extending to West Africa and

Africa as a whole system. Since what happens to a part or unit of a system affects the others and then the system as a body.

Moreover, in international politics and diplomacy, it is important for each nation involved to first of all consider its national interests. And any move or relation that could jeopardize these interests would essentially be discouraged or outrightly avoided (Shively, 2008). Thus, Morocco is seeing humongous opportunity in being a part of ECOWAS, and its aim is to reduce its dependence on Europe, and diversify its economy into emerging markets where its firms can benefit from being relatively competitive (Fabiani, 2018). ECOWAS member states and most especially Nigeria should, of utmost importance consider what they stand to benefit or lose by Morocco's membership in the ECOWAS.

Trade and Economic Relations between ECOWAS and Morocco

Following Morocco's rejoining of the AU without any resolve to the issue of the African Union's insistence on the sovereignty of Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic that made it leave in the first place, it is currently bidding to join the ECOWAS, even though it does not share geographical boundaries with any West Africa State. Also, the ECOWAS recognizes the rights of people in Western Sahara to independence and self-determination and Morocco does not (Hassan, 2017). All these raises questions to the true intentions of this North African Kingdom (PLAC, 2017).

While Morocco stands to gain a lot in its membership of the ECOWAS, it already enjoys considerably high bilateral relations with most countries in the West. As observed by Hassan, (2017, para. 10), "Morocco is already heavily involved with the West African Economic and Monetary Union and claims that its greatest investment is in West Africa." Of what use would a controversial membership be to it then, if such would lead to a possible disorganization of the economic community? Considering that it is a monarchical government, it would be the only undemocratic member-state of the West African organization. In other words, it would not only

not be sharing geographical boundaries with any West African state, it would not be having similar governing tenets with other members, thereby not falling in line with a “true” system formation (structure) where all units or parts should have certain level of inter-connectivity and similarity (Dougherty, and Pfaltzgraff, 1997).

Morocco, as classified among states in North Africa, should put things in order in its region, resolve the Western Sahara independence issue, and being a major voice in the region, it should make the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) work (Ibrahim, 2017). This would go a long way in building the confidence of ECOWAS members in its capacity to be a member of a union and not contribute to making a regional body moribund like it did to AMU. Morocco has been having an observer status in the ECOWAS since 2005, and currently participates in the community’s activities (Hassan, 2017). Thus, the Kingdom of Morocco should focus on putting its house (region) in order, while working towards maintaining the relationship it has with the West African sub-region and not feed suspicions by wanting to be an official member of a regional body to which it does not naturally belong.

Conclusion

The paper has attempted an explanation of the politics of Morocco, a North African Kingdom, wanting to be a member of the regional organization in West Africa from the system theory’s perspective. The distance from the North to West Africa, and the nature of regional economic community (REC) distribution by the OAU, now the AU, makes the interest of Morocco in this organization suspicious to ECOWAS and most especially, Nigeria which is a prominent figure in the economic bloc. While Morocco sees economic opportunity in being part of the regional body, it does not have legal backing to that effect. Opponents of Morocco’s ECOWAS membership fear that the region could turn to a dumping ground for European products, considering the close proximity of Morocco to Europe and the kind of economic relationship they have established over time.

Also, apart from the fear of whittling Nigeria's influence if Morocco's bid is granted, there is also the fear of easy movements for terrorists from the North to the West, thereby further stretching the security issues in the region and most especially Nigeria with its battle against the Boko Haram insurgents. Nevertheless, as noted earlier that Morocco presently has cordial economic relations with most West African countries and it also has had an observer status in the ECOWAS since 2005, it would however do well for itself not to feed suspicions by its interest of being an official member of the organization because it is important for all parts of a system to be able to function inter-connectively and inter-dependently without the fear of domination by the parts.

Thus, the paper suggests that the Kingdom of Morocco, as a key figure in the North African region, should focus on making its regional organization, the Arab Maghreb Union (AMU) work again, and prove that it is capable of being a member of an organization without precipitating its extinction. It can play utmost role in stabilizing its regional organization while maintaining cordial relations with other regions in Africa without destabilizing the regional classifications based on geographical location by the AU.

Finally, it is important to point that the national interest of each state will be the guiding principle in their decision to either support or go against this bid. However, Article 9 of the ECOWAS Revised Treaty of 1993 enables it to act on a matter under consideration by a unanimous consensus or a two-thirds majority (ECOWAS, 1993). As such, member states of ECOWAS who do not want Morocco onboard will have to canvass others to this effect.

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