

**AFRICA RISK CONSULTING****Algeria Briefing March 2023**

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**Algeria Summary 13 March 2023**

*The European Union (EU)'s representative for foreign affairs and security policy, Josep Borrell, begins a two-day visit to Algeria on 12 March. Borrell affirms the EU's commitment to Algeria and importantly calls Algeria a trusted energy partner. The European Commission is reportedly considering initiating retaliatory measures against Algeria for its decision to suspend its two-decade-old friendship treaty with Spain which has raised uncertainty over energy supplies for the European country. France's President Emmanuel Macron (2017-present) announces on 27 February that he will continue to "move forward" to strengthen ties with Algeria. However, the Algerian government is refusing to deliver temporary consular passes for the repatriation of its nationals expelled from French territory, exacerbating tensions. Algerian authorities are facing heavy criticism for their inhumane treatment and expulsion of Sub-Saharan migrants on 10, 12 and 14 February. This recent incident highlights Algeria's human rights record and the criticism it has received from the United Nations and lawmakers in the United States and EU*

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**EU foreign affairs chief Josep Borrell visits Algeria seeking to deepen ties...**

The **European Union's (EU)** high representative for foreign affairs and security policy, **Josep Borrell**, began a two-day visit to **Algeria** on 12 March, the first of its kind since he took office in December 2019.<sup>1</sup> Borrell gave an interview to the local newspaper **El Khabar** on 12 March, where he affirmed the EU's commitment to its partnership with Algeria and noted that the bloc is open to listening to any concrete proposals from Algeria regarding their bilateral association agreement.<sup>2</sup> Algeria holds an association agreement with the EU but has expressed frustration and requested that it be reviewed to better suit both parties. However, Borrell said that the agreement is the "*cornerstone of a partnership that the Union wants to be solid and strategic, with a neighbour that is very important to us*".<sup>3</sup> He also stressed that the agreement "*contains the necessary elements whether legal or institutional*" that allow both parties to achieve common goals in line with their mutual interests.<sup>4</sup>

Borrell also highlighted that the meeting of the **Association Council** between the EU and Algeria has been impeded by the recent diplomatic rift between Algeria and **Spain**.<sup>5</sup> Borrell emphasised that he hopes a solution to the crisis is reached soon as the "*blockage is not in the interest of both parties*".<sup>6</sup> Borrell further stressed that Algeria remains a trusted energy partner for Europe and a trusted natural gas supplier, particularly during a time when Europe is facing an acute energy crisis:

*"[Algeria] plays a very important role in securing European energy supplies at a moment that we consider decisive. We are aware of that, and we are grateful."*<sup>7</sup>

Global demand for natural gas is experiencing rapid growth, particularly in the EU, which is searching for alternatives to **Russian** energy supplies, creating opportunities for Algeria. Last

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<sup>1</sup> Almayadeen, 12 Mar 2023; Algeria Press Service, 12 March 2023

<sup>2</sup> El Kabbar, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>3</sup> Almayadeen, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>4</sup> El Kabbar, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>5</sup> Almayadeen, 12 Mar 2023; El Kabbar, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>6</sup> Almayadeen, 12 Mar 2023; El Kabbar, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>7</sup> Almayadeen, 12 Mar 2023; El Kabbar, 12 Mar 2023

year, state-owned energy company **Sonatrach** signed deals to supply additional quantities of gas to **Italy**, amounting to 9 billion cubic metres, in addition to supplying 300 million cubic metres (mcm) of gas to **Slovenia** for the first time.<sup>8</sup> Algeria provides Europe with gas through two key pipelines – the **Transmed-Enrico Mattei** pipeline reaches Italy across the **Mediterranean**, and the **Medgaz** pipeline passes directly from the Algerian north-western coast to **Almeria** in southern Spain.<sup>9</sup>

Borrel declared the EU's intention to provide financial support for renewable energy, energy efficiency, and hydrogen, and explained that Algeria "*has excellent potential in these fields, which are still underutilised*".<sup>10</sup> He said that the EU sees their partnership with Algeria in a long-term perspective and desires to mobilise capital and technology to support the development of these sectors in Algeria. Given Algeria's centrality to Europe's energy needs, it is not surprising to see Borrell's efforts to bolster ties with the country, however, Algeria's diplomatic tensions with **France** and Spain could hamper efforts to strengthen ties.

### **EU Commission pledges to act against Algeria...**

The **European Commission (EC)** is reportedly considering initiating retaliatory measures against Algeria for its decision to suspend its two-decade-old friendship treaty with Spain.<sup>11</sup> Diplomatic tensions between Algeria and Spain began when Spain's Prime Minister **Pedro Sanchez** (2018-present), officially endorsed **Morocco's** autonomy plan for Western Sahara on 18 March 2022 as "*the most serious, realistic and credible basis for settling the dispute*" (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Apr 2022*).<sup>12</sup> Morocco considers the **Western Saharan** territory as its own; however, the Algeria-backed **Polisario Front** movement demands a sovereign state.<sup>13</sup>

Following Spain's announcement, Algeria's government on 19 March recalled its ambassador to Madrid for "*consultations*".<sup>14</sup> Political tensions with Morocco over Western Sahara have also hampered Algeria's export potential and resulted in the closure of the **Maghreb-Europe** gas pipeline to Spain in October 2021 (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Nov 2021*).<sup>15</sup> Algeria is Spain's main supplier of natural gas through the Medgaz pipeline, which replaced the Maghreb-Europe pipeline through Morocco that Algiers terminated in October.<sup>16</sup> The EU at the time expressed concern regarding Algeria's decision and urged the government to reverse the action.

Diplomatic tension between Algeria and Spain reached a peak on 8 June 2022 when Algeria suspended the treaty, which raised uncertainty over energy supplies for the European country (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Jun 2022*).<sup>17</sup> State-owned **Algerian Press Agency (APS)** reported after the suspension that Algeria had decided to immediately suspend the treaty of friendship, good-neighbourliness and cooperation it signed with Spain on 8 October 2022 over Spain's violation of "*international legality*" in **Western Sahara**.<sup>18</sup>

Spanish news publication **Europa Press** reported on 17 February that while the EC has suggested that Spain and Algeria are "*capable of resolving the trade crisis resulting from the suspension of the treaty*", it made it clear that it is "*closely monitoring the issue and will act if*

<sup>8</sup> Anadolu Agency, 15 Dec 2022

<sup>9</sup> Anadolu Agency, 15 Dec 2022

<sup>10</sup> Almayadeen, 12 Mar 2023; El Kabar, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>11</sup> Morocco World News, 19 Feb 2023

<sup>12</sup> Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

<sup>13</sup> Reuters, 18 Mar 2022

<sup>14</sup> Middle East Eye, 19 Mar 2022

<sup>15</sup> Middle East Monitor, 20 Apr 2022

<sup>16</sup> Middle East Monitor, 30 Mar 2022

<sup>17</sup> Bloomberg, 11 Jun 2022

<sup>18</sup> Morocco World News, 12 Jun 2022

necessary”.<sup>19</sup> The EC trade spokesperson, **Miriam Garcia Ferrer**, said that the bloc has been raising concerns about Algeria’s decision to suspend the friendship treaty as it directly impacts energy shipments to Spain. The now closed Maghreb-Europe pipeline used to transport over 13,500 million cubic metres of natural gas annually to Europe.<sup>20</sup> Spanish foreign minister **Jose Manuel Albares**, also confirmed in January that his country is still facing major challenges due to Algier’s decision to suspend the treaty, particularly problems with commercial operations. The EC’s deputy director **Denis Redonnet** also echoed similar concerns about Algeria in February, describing the situation as “*very worrying and complex*”:

*“The measures taken by Algeria’s authorities are of great concern, not only in Spain but also for the EU, as they affect the common commercial policies.”<sup>21</sup>*

Despite the political dispute, Algeria remained the main supplier of natural gas to Spain in January, accounting for 25.7% of the total, followed by the **United States** at 21.3%.<sup>22</sup> However, it is unclear how far the EC could sanction Algeria given the country’s significance in helping European countries with the acute energy crisis, particularly Italy, which turned to Algeria as an energy partner following the imposing of sanctions on Russia. The US also does not want relations with Algeria to deteriorate further - as seen during former US president **Donald Trump**’s (2016-2020) tenure when the US recognised Moroccan sovereignty over Western Sahara - as the two benefits from counterterrorism cooperation that has been in place since 2001, as well as limited economic and political cooperation that has developed in recent years.<sup>23</sup>

### **Macron hopes to strengthen strained ties as Algeria retaliates...**

France’s President **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) announced on 27 February that he will continue to “*move forward*” to strengthen ties with both Algeria and Morocco and that France “*must build a new balanced, mutual and responsible relationship*” with African countries.<sup>24</sup> Macron declared his intention for improved relations with the North African countries before embarking on a tour of four **Central African** countries including **Angola, Gabon, Republic of Congo** and the **Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC)**.<sup>25</sup> The timing of Macron’s announcement can be interpreted as an expression of feeling among the French elite that the European country is gradually losing its influence in Africa. French ties with Algeria in particular have hit new lows in recent months.

Algeria recalled **Said Moussi**, the country’s ambassador to **France**, on 8 February for consultations with immediate effect after accusing France of orchestrating the escape of **Amira Bouraoui**, a rights activist Algeria wanted to arrest (*ARC Briefing Algeria Feb 2023*).<sup>26</sup> Algeria recalled Moussi after Bouraoui allegedly crossed into **Tunisia** illegally after evading Algerian judicial surveillance, where she was arrested upon her arrival on 7 February and faced an extradition hearing, however, a Tunisian court ordered her to be freed and she was subsequently permitted to leave the country on 8 February.<sup>27</sup> Bouraoui’s release and flight to Paris were reportedly due to French diplomatic pressure on Tunisia.<sup>28</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Europa Press, 17 Feb 2023; Morocco World News, 19 Feb 2023

<sup>20</sup> Europa Press, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>21</sup> Morocco World News, 19 Feb 2023

<sup>22</sup> Asharq Al-Awsat, 12 Mar 2023

<sup>23</sup> Arab Centre, 25 Jan 2023

<sup>24</sup> Middle East Monitor, 2 Mar 2023

<sup>25</sup> Middle East Monitor, 2 Mar 2023

<sup>26</sup> Bloomberg, 11 Jun 2022

<sup>27</sup> News24, 9 Feb 2023

<sup>28</sup> News24, 9 Feb 2023

Macron also visited Algiers last year on a trip that was meant to resolve years of difficult relations over visa issues. French interior minister **Gerald Darmanin** stated via a **Twitter** post on 18 December that **Paris** had resolved visa issues with Algeria stemming from a decision to reduce visa quotes, and announced a return “to a normal consular relationship” with Algeria and an “*extremely strong relationship*” between them (see *ARC Briefing Algeria Jan 2023*).<sup>29</sup> With visa tensions and issues of the colonial rule laid to rest, it was hoped that relations would form a renewed partnership, however, tensions started to simmer again when Tebboune said on 31 December that France must set itself free from its “*coloniser complex*” for diplomatic relations to be reshaped between the two countries.<sup>30</sup> Macron responded on 11 January that he does not intend to “*ask for forgiveness*” over France’s colonisation of Algeria and its role in the war of independence.<sup>31</sup>

The Algerian government is now reportedly refusing to deliver temporary consular passes for the repatriation of its nationals expelled from French territory.<sup>32</sup> A major contention of the visa row was that France required Algeria to issue passes for its citizens expelled from the country, and this latest move by Algeria means that bilateral relations show no signs of recovery and are instead moving in the opposite direction. A local analyst told **Africa Risk Consulting Briefing (ARC Briefing)** that the move by Algeria stopping to issue consular passes is “*definitely a retaliatory measure*”:

*“Paris and Algiers are caught up in a tit-for-tat dynamic. It is not clear at the moment how far it will go but it is evident that both governments are strong-headed in their views.”<sup>33</sup>*

### **Algeria faces condemnation for the inhuman expulsion of Sub-Saharan migrants...**

Authorities are facing heavy criticism for their “*inhumane expulsion*” of close to 900 **sub-Saharan** migrants who were left abandoned and unattended in the **Saharan** desert at Algeria’s border with neighbouring **Niger** in February.<sup>34</sup> A local non-governmental organisation (NGO), **Alarm Phone Sahara**, which assists migrants in distress or facing oppression from governments, said that authorities on 12 February deported approximately 899 migrants from 16 sub-Saharan countries.<sup>35</sup> The migrants were reportedly transported in dozens of buses and dumped at **Assamaka**, a border town between Algeria and Niger. Authorities deported a total of 2,298 migrants on the three days of 10, 12 and 14 February.

The deported migrants who were considered illegal on Algerian territory stem from countries which include **Benin, Nigeria, Senegal, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Cameroon, Gambia, Mali, Côte d’Ivoire, Burkina Faso** and **Costa Rica**.<sup>36</sup> The deportation of African migrants to Niger’s border by Algeria has been in place since 2014. International NGO **Doctors Without Borders** reports that over 23,171 African migrants have been expelled from Algeria since 2020, while Alarm Phone Sahara estimates that since the beginning of this year, at least 4,395 have been deported.<sup>37</sup> Algeria has deportation agreements with Niger and Mali, but the deals have been heavily criticised by Algerian as well as international NGOs, demanding they be annulled.<sup>38</sup> Several local NGOs have slammed Algeria for how migrants are treated with authorities accused of ignoring

<sup>29</sup> Africa News, 19 Dec 2022

<sup>30</sup> Almayadeen, 31 Dec 2022

<sup>31</sup> Politico, 11 Jan 2022

<sup>32</sup> North Africa Post, 3 Mar 2023

<sup>33</sup> ARC Source, Local Analyst

<sup>34</sup> Alarm Phone Sahara, 12 Feb 2023; North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>35</sup> Alarm Phone Sahara, 12 Feb 2023; North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>36</sup> North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>37</sup> North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>38</sup> North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

basic human rights and even rights for asylum.<sup>39</sup> Alarm Phone Sahara notes that when migrants are arrested, they are first reportedly hauled in prisons which are in inhumane conditions and then dumped in Assamaka where a humanitarian crisis already exists.<sup>40</sup> Deported migrants in Assamaka find themselves unattended, without shelter, water, food or blankets to protect themselves against the desert colds at night.<sup>41</sup> Local NGOs in Algeria that speak out against migrant deportations are also usually targeted by state authorities. One such organisation is the **Ligue Algérienne de Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH)** (Algerian league for the defence of human rights) which was dismantled in January.

Algeria, however, is not the only country in North Africa facing condemnation for its treatment of African migrants. The life of migrants in Tunisia have progressively worsened, particularly following president **Kais Saied's** (2019-present) 21 February statements at the country's **National Security Council**, in which he said migration from sub-Saharan Africa aimed to change Tunisia's national identity.<sup>42</sup> Saied also said that undocumented immigration to Tunisia had led to violence and crime, and needed to end quickly.<sup>43</sup> Saied's comments and rhetoric have since been denounced by the president's opponents and the **African Union (AU)**, and have led to what has been described by advocacy groups as a racist backlash against sub-Saharan Africans living in Tunisia, as well as Black Tunisians.<sup>44</sup>

However, neither Algeria nor Tunisia seems to have made any meaningful changes in addressing the migrant challenges in their countries. At the moment it does not appear to be any immediate repercussions for Algeria but the development raises intense political pressure on the government which in recent years has repeatedly been criticised for its human rights record by the **United Nations**, lawmakers in the US and EU, and both domestic and international human rights NGOs. In recent months, many western lawmakers have called for sanctions on Algeria for its human rights record and deep relations with Russia, but given its significance to the EU's energy needs, Algeria may survive any strong sanctions.

### Planner

2023 **Moscow (Russia)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Moscow;

May 2023 **Paris (France)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Paris;

### Chronology

11 Mar 2023 **Rabat (Morocco)** *North Africa Post*. **Morocco** underlines Algeria's responsibility to guarantee safe and unrestricted humanitarian access to the **Tindouf** camps and to allow free registration of the populations sequestered in the camps, per international humanitarian law;

11 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Daily Monitor*. **Ugandan** president **Yoweri Museveni** arrives in Algeria for a two-day state visit;

10 Mar 2023 **Rabat (Morocco)** *Morocco World News*. **Morocco** denounces **South Africa's** apparent complicity with Algeria and the separatist **Polisario Front**, for its unconditional

<sup>39</sup> North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>40</sup> Alarm Phone Sahara, 12 Feb 2023; North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>41</sup> Alarm Phone Sahara, 12 Feb 2023; North Africa Post, 17 Feb 2023

<sup>42</sup> Al Jazeera, 4 Mar 2023

<sup>43</sup> Al Jazeera, 4 Mar 2023

<sup>44</sup> Al Jazeera, 4 Mar 2023

appropriation of Algeria's geopolitical agenda, and its blind ideological support to the armed separatist group;

9 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Reuters*. **European** traders say Algeria's state grains agency **OAIC** is thought to have purchased an estimated 200,000 tonnes of durum wheat in an international tender which closed on 8 March;

8 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. **French** news publication **France 24's** 3 March interview with terrorist leader **Youssef al-Annabi**, the current leader of **al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM)** sparks uproar and frustration among the international community, as he also officially confirms his group is holding French journalist **Olivier Dubois**, who was kidnapped in **Mali** in 2021;

6 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Army chief of staff, **Said Chengriha**, says that Algeria prefers an approach based on assisting **African** countries that suffer problems with security without interfering in their internal affairs;

6 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Mission Network News*. International Christian group **Mission Network News** says that a state-led campaign against Protestant churches continues in Algeria and that only ten churches remain open in the entire country;

4 Mar 2023 **Washington (United States)** *United States State Department*. The **United States (US)** undersecretary for arms control and international security, **Bonnie Jenkins**, will travel to **Algeria** and **Benin** from 4 to 9 March for meetings on a range of security, non-proliferation, and arms control issues;

2 Mar 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Asharq Al-Awsat*. **United Kingdom (UK)** state minister for the armed forces **James Stephen Heappey** says that the UK acknowledges the historic Algerian-Russian ties, but that the UK is willing to help Ukraine reach the goals determined by the people and democratically elected government;

26 Feb 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Foreign ministry says it will reopen its embassy in **Kyiv (Ukraine)** one year after it was closed over **Russia's** invasion of Ukraine;

24 Feb 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. The standing decision-making organ of the **African Union (AU)**, the **Peace and Security Council**, issues its annual report reaffirming neutrality on the **Western Sahara** issue;

22 Feb 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights*. **United Nations (UN)** special rapporteur on the situation of human rights defenders, **Mary Lawlor**, expresses concern over an escalating crackdown against civil society by Algerian authorities after the dissolutions of **La Ligue Algérienne pour la Défense des Droits de l'Homme (LADDH)** and **le Rassemblement Actions Jeunesse (RAJ)**, two of the most important human rights associations in the country;

22 Feb 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. Trade ministry official, **Ahmed Makarani**, says that Algeria will import 20,000 tonnes of fresh meat and 10,000 calves for slaughter in a measure aimed at controlling prices during the holy month of Ramadan;

17 Feb 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** affirms that Algeria is willing to reduce the danger of tension, which has characterised international relations, to be in the best position to defend its strategic interests;

16 Feb 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** and his **Tunisian** counterpart **Kais Saied** hold a phone call and speak of the "*stable, fraternal, bilateral relations between the two brotherly countries*", denying reports that there is a rift

between the countries following Algerian political activist **Amira Bouraoui** escape to **France** from Tunisia.

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