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As this century takes shape, everyone agrees that the near future will witness changes of unprecedented scope in human history. These changes will render many controversies obsolete and many policies profoundly out of step with new challenges. This is not the place for a detailed examination of such complex and sensitive issues, some of the most important being poverty, climate change and the incredible technological revolution taking place, all of which pose threats to world peace and stability as well as human survival. It should be noted, however, that we have just a few years to address these issues with unprecedented focus – in other words, we must act urgently and we must use collective and appropriate efforts. The huge challenges facing societies leave us with no other choice.

When we examine the underlying reasons for this situation, we must acknowledge that the strongest manifestations of these threats arise over geographic issues. Across the world, land provokes disputes that seem impossible to resolve, whether by peaceful means, weapons or time.

Within each country, even the least contested and least subject to centripetal influences, nationalist and separatist tendencies are being expressed with increasing force, often backed by powers fully supportive of principles that they are the first to trample when it comes to domestic matters and their own populations.

Locally, nationally and domestically, the legitimate aspiration for the recognition of local cultures and the demand by various populations and their elites for greater participation and autonomy must be leveraged to drive development and progress. In Morocco, the regionalisation policy must make every effort to provide as much autonomy as necessary to all regions with a sufficient degree of historical and cultural homogeneity in order to mobilise their energies and strengths for the benefit of their residents – while ensuring positive outcomes and a domino effect on the rest of the country.

Such an effort is not easy because it must overcome both political and psychological obstacles to eliminate conventional talk and traditional platitudes. The initiatives taken by Morocco, through its highest authority, the King, together with the creation of the Royal Advisory Council for Saharan Affairs (CORCAS) and the recommendations of these southern provinces' consultative body,

should lead to concrete proposals for advanced decentralisation and autonomy. This would open potentially attractive regional intelligence opportunities for economic and social development, stability, peace and greater involvement by citizens in managing their own affairs – provided that the international community supports such a plan and that the country's Algerian neighbour presents no insurmountable obstacles.

Without going into further detail, which would, in any case, be premature, the same approach should prevail in all regions of Morocco and feature structures and tools that foster effective efforts tailored to each situation. From our perspective here, the creation of regional observatories responsible for collecting, analysing and distributing relevant, multifaceted regional data should help local officials with the decision-making process. These observatories would provide the necessary strategic intelligence for anyone aiming for effective, long-term action, with information technologies increasing the potential uses of this data. Dedicated regional funding agencies are, in turn, designed to arrange the necessary financing and other resources for the purpose of spurring investment and creating new businesses.

Tax policy should be reformed in tandem with these efforts as a further way to support the change process, in terms of appropriate taxation levels, procedures, allocations and collections.

It goes without saying that in this context, in North Africa, the creation of a homogeneous unit is a necessity to which we will have to resign ourselves sooner or later, certainly not for some sentimental desire or lyrical evocation of unity as we have often heard in the Arab world. Instead, the time has come for a marriage of convenience, imposed by both geopolitics and the economy. To do so, it is not at all necessary to believe in illusory slogans that keep us from seeing the reality of the reciprocal interests such a union would encourage or the increased capacity for influence that it would give States in the region, notably regarding their dialogue and negotiations with the rest of the world in general and Europe in particular. It would suffice to work together developing highly influential projects in priority fields, such as energy and infrastructure projects, which would serve as an edifying harbinger of a future characterised by peace, stability, dialogue and sustainable development.

This reinvigorated region would then be able to contribute to the building of an even more significant area – the Mediterranean basin. We know that over the centuries centres of influence have continually moved from East to West, until reaching the shores of the Pacific in our time and thus gradually reducing the role of the Mediterranean region in world affairs. Only increased cooperation, together with comprehensive initiatives, needed investments, freedom of movement and free trade can still open new opportunities in the Mediterranean area – especially since southern Europe will carry no weight in European affairs and Europe itself will have no influence in



world affairs without demographic, cultural, economic and energy contributions from the entire Mediterranean basin.

We must again address and eliminate the tensions from another age through a shared act of political will based on concerted efforts of cooperation and integration.

Another issue, which is fraught with major risks, is the rapid, uncontrolled growth of cities. While the urban population currently accounts for only 50% of the world population, it will exceed 70% in 20 to 30 years and large metropolitan areas with millions of people will be legion. What types of infrastructure and services will meet basic needs for safety, goods, sanitation, transport, etc.? What type of governance will arise when mafias of all kinds try to exploit the situation by expanding their empire, particularly in the most impoverished countries, where large urban concentrations will grow like mushrooms in a damp forest?

It would be pure folly to think that this issue could be resolved without a parallel and more equitable distribution of global wealth. Such a measure would provide true justification for the concept of sustainable development – and true relevance as well.

If there is any cause for hope that we may escape these threats, it is if we seriously rethink these issues and address them as they should be addressed – in a coordinated and coherent manner based on regional intelligence.

More than ever, technology and knowledge are the cornerstone of all progress and determine the nature and reach of the strategies deployed. They are the true determinants of development.

In brief, the forces in play are demanding increasing participation and thus autonomy in the management of local affairs. At regional level, the creation of complementary economic and political bodies represents a latent, but genuine aspiration and a clear economic imperative. At global level, the major geostrategic challenges of all kinds, especially environmental, create a need for greater cooperation and concerted collective action. Global governance problems will emerge with growing urgency.

These three levels interact in such a way as to make it impossible for a single player to act alone.

