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The role of non-state actors in the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources

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ABSTRACT
This article examines the influence of non-state actors – particularly non-governmental organisations – on major import companies, investors, and transporters of Sahrawi natural resources, as well as the bodies of the European Union, its member states, the Polisario Front and, additionally, other non-state actors. The aim is to determine whether these actors have had an impact on changing the strategy of the Polisario Front with respect to its demands, reinforcing the movement's focus on safeguarding the natural resources of the territory of Western Sahara, protecting them against exploitation, and ensuring that they benefit the Sahrawi people. To that end, the study analyses the actions of non-state actors, the frames they employ, and the levels where they operate. Thanks to more than 20 interviews conducted with the heads of a variety of non-state actors, new research questions have arisen at the same time that awareness has been raised about the importance of renewable resources as an additional object of the claims made by both the Polisario Front and non-governmental organisations.

KEYWORDS Western Sahara; Morocco; non-state actors; natural resources; Polisario Front

Introduction

The changing strategy of the Polisario Front (PF) in response to the resolution of the conflict in Western Sahara has drawn attention to both the relationship between the movement and various non-state actors (NSAs) and the influence of these actors on claims regarding the permanent sovereignty of the Sahrawi people to the natural resources in their territory.[1] On the international stage, the history of the PF has been characterised by diplomatic efforts to obtain the right to self-determination in the form of a referendum, and to gain recognition of the systematic violation of their rights by Morocco since the country occupied Western Sahara. The current strategy of the

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Polisario Front and the non-state actors who support the claims of the Sahrawi people, however, focuses more on their right to administer, exploit, and benefit from the natural resources in the territory (Saul 2015; Allan 2016; Hagen and Pfeifer 2018; Campos 2008).

This article analyses the role of non-state actors, primarily non-governmental organisations (NGOs), as vectors of change that influence other non-state actors as well as large import companies, investors, and transporters of Sahrawi natural resources, the bodies of the European Union (EU) and its member states, and the Polisario Front itself. In the process, the article identifies the non-state actors involved in this area, examining how they employ new frames and the levels where they conduct their activities, whether national, international, and/or supranational. To that end, the study draws on the work done by Voltolini (2015, 2016) concerning lobbying by non-state actors in EU foreign policy-making in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. A combination of Voltolini's approach, the theory of constructivism in international relations, and an analytical framework that centres on the role, frame, and levels of non-state actors is applied to the Western Sahara conflict and the right of the Sahrawi people to exploit and benefit from their own natural resources.

The resources at stake in this context include phosphates, fisheries, oil and gas, and agriculture, which – as non-renewable resources – have negative economic, political, and social repercussions both today and for future generations of Sahrawis (Allan 2016; Byron 2017; Hagen and Pfeifer 2018). However, interviews conducted with the heads of some non-state actors revealed that renewable energies, such as solar, wind, and sand energy, have moved to the forefront of the Polisario Front's claims and analyses. Control over these resources is increasingly being viewed as a potential threat to the long-term rights of the Sahrawi people, although they are often overlooked at this time (E 4 and E 8).

Theoretical framework

The consideration of non-state actors as capable of influencing foreign policy and formulating demands is the result of a break with the traditional conception that states are the only legitimate actors (Voltolini 2016; Turhan and Bahçecik 2020). The theory of constructivism has revealed the production of new frames in which NSAs both have an influence and are, in turn, influenced by other non-state and state actors. This study adopts the definition used by Voltolini (2016, 3) of NSAs 'as individuals or groups that conduct activities aimed at influencing the policy-making process and display three key features. First, they have a minimum level of organisation […]; second, they are autonomous of the government […]; and, third, they aim to play a role in EU foreign policy-making'. The change of 'frame' in this context relates to the growing interest in the exploitation of natural

resources as an economic issue on the part of the Polisario Front and the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR), as well the use of legal recourses to demand compliance with the Sahrawis' permanent sovereignty over the natural resources in Western Sahara and their right to use and benefit from them. This principle is deduced from the right to free self-determination as established by international law (Dawidowicz 2013; Hummelbrunner and Prickartz 2016; Byron 2017). In practice, after 2012 – in other words, after the EU-Morocco Agreement was signed concerning reciprocal liberalisation measures on agricultural and fishery products (2012/2522(RSP)), despite the European Parliament's vote against it in December 2011 – the Polisario Front filed an appeal with the Court of Justice of the European Union (Soroeta Liceras 2016, 2017; Wrange 2019). With the national courts, like the United Kingdom High Court, an NGO, Western Sahara Campaign UK, brought action (Kassoti 2019; Naïli 2019). In South Africa and Panama, lawsuits were also brought by the Polisario Front itself (WSRW 2019), although in this case, the subject-matter of the dispute was the illegal export and transport of phosphates extracted from the deposits at Bou Craa by the Moroccan *Office Chérifien des Phosphates* (OCP). As discussed in other articles in this Special Issue, Morocco is able to illegally benefit from this exploitation without the consent of the Sahrawi people or, even, any way to obtain it (Chapaux 2007; Hummelbrunner and Prickartz 2016; Naïli 2019).

This modification to the frame used by the Polisario Front (PF) and SADR raises questions: Are NSAs the vectors of change here? If so, how do they exercise their influence and over whom? Answering these questions requires an analysis of the activities in which non-state actors engage and their type; the ability of these actors to access and participate in negotiations related to decision-making processes; and the resources at their disposal, both economic and human.

The hypothesis here is that actors with no connection to states play a role in the formulation of both foreign and external policies (Joachim and Dembinski 2011; Menashy 2016). The concept of governance can also apply to this sphere when public-private associations are created to promote and execute policies. Consequently, the logical theoretical focus in this analysis is constructivism (which differs from rationalism when foreign policy is involved), thanks to the role of interaction in influencing behaviours and the existence of different rules for different levels (Voltolini 2016). Constructivism reveals how civil society attempts to have an impact on the foreign policy of states. NGOs, in particular, usually influence government in four ways: setting agendas, negotiating outcomes, conferring legitimacy, and implementing solutions (Turhan and Bahçecik 2020, 2, 3).

Allan and Hadden (2017) have studied the framing power of NGOs in global climate politics, highlighting the symbolic power of NGO campaigns, their discursive influence when adding phrases to negotiation texts; their

ability to influence agendas; and, above all, their capacity to form new coalitions between other NGOs and state actors. They also argue that NGOs have two routes to influence: persuasion and coercion. The former concerns an actor's ability to change the preference of another actor; while with the latter, the actor changes the other's behaviour without having changed their preferences. Corell and Betsill (2001; Betsill and Corell 2008) support this methodological approach and provide a definition of influence that is applied in this article (Corell and Betsill 2001, 87–88). These scholars make a distinction within the concept of influence between the intentional transmission of information, on the one hand, and the production of alterations in the behaviour of actors in response to that transmission, on the other. Information about the participation of NGOs in the foreign policy of a state actor is obtained by tracking the NGO's activity, its ability to access negotiations, and its financial and human resources (Corell and Betsill 2001).

This study is based on the approach used by Voltolini to analyse the lobby made up of non-state actors involved in European Union foreign policy in the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. The author delineates three fundamental analytical elements: the role, the frame, and the level. The 'role' refers to the actors and how they interact with policy-makers, defining actions and reactions, as well as the behaviours expected of the actors and the rules. Moreover, the role determines the bases on which the frame is developed – what Voltolini calls the tools – and establishes a typology of actors according to the roles they play: dialogue-builders, voice-articulators, or opponents (Table 1).

Table 1. Categories of NSA roles.

	DIALOGUE-BUILDER	VOICE- ARTICULATOR	OPPONENT
APPROACH	Access	Information politics	Protest politics and litigation
FORM OF SOCIAL INTERACTION	Cooperative and dialogical	Mixed between cooperative and contentious	Confrontational and contentious
STYLE	Arguing and persuasion	Challenging, a mix of bargaining and arguing	Contestation, no room for consensual interactions
TARGET AUDIENCE	Officials and policy-makers	Public, but specifically officials, policy-makers and the informed public	General public
MEANS	Informal meetings and private communications	Workshops, seminars, editorial/newspaper articles	Judicial means, demonstrations, letter campaigns
RESULTS IN	Cooperation and shared understanding/ meaning (argumentation)	Partial cooperation/ partial challenge; shared meaning possible; some room for the construction and negotiation of meaning	Conflict and no compromise on a shared meaning/understanding

Source: Voltolini 2016, 19

The second analytical element concerns the 'frame', understood as the lobbying tools employed or, in other words, the activities carried out by the actors. The frame defines how the actors perceive the world and the bases on which they work, and are the result of a social construction between the producer, the receiver, and the object of the framing processes (Voltolini 2016, 33). Non-state actors offer certain frames to policy-makers to discuss and share during the social interactions that define their relationships with other non-state actors, companies, the EU, and, in this case, the Polisario Front. Three typologies of frames have been established: political frames, which emphasise discriminatory aspects, historical memory, and moral ideas related to good and bad; technical frames, which are well-structured and use arguments based on empirical data, legal references, or technical references; and mixed frames, which are also based on empirical evidence, but draw on well-known political arguments as well (Voltolini 2016, 23).

The third analytical element in Voltolini's study is 'level'. This concerns where and with whom lobbying activities are conducted, for example, at the national, European Union, or transnational level. A distinction in the typology is made here between internalisation, in which demands are transformed into domestic questions and the national level lobbies the EU; externalisation, where the demands are channelled through Brussels and the lobby to the European Commission; and supranationalisation, which consists of creating umbrella organisations with other international groups.

Methodology

The non-state actors chosen for this study focus their work on Western Sahara and its natural resources and have played an important role in defending the rights of the Sahrawi people. They are both international and national (found in the occupied territories and refugee camps). The following fourteen NSAs were selected based on their objectives, activities, and capacity to influence: Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW); Western Sahara Campaign United Kingdom (WSC UK); Western Sahara Campaign New Zealand (WSC NZ); Australian Western Sahara Association (AWSA); Emmaus Stockholm; *Équipe Média*; *Centre d'Études et de Documentation Franco-Sahraoui, Ahmed Baba MISKE*; International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT) and Observatory of Human Rights and Business (ODHE); Sahrawi Campaign Against the Plunder (SCAP); Diaspora Coordinator Against the Plunder; Association for the Monitoring of Resources and the Protection of the Environment in Western Sahara (AMRPEWS); *Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos* (COAG); *Asociación Canaria de Amistad con el Pueblo Saharaui* (ACAPS); and the Global Legal Action Network (GLAN).

The choice of the NGOs was also based on references obtained during the early interviews conducted with volunteers and activists from these NSAs and

experts in the field (Joanna Allan, Davide Contini, Meriem Naïli, Isaías Barreñada), as well as suggestions from the interviewees themselves, the directors of some of the NSAs. With this information, a perusal of reports, some social network tracking (particularly Twitter), and a review of the official webpages, it was possible to identify the main organisations and their leaders. After the NSAs had been chosen, secondary sources (the most pertinent publications and reports issued by the NSAs) were added to the primary source material. A total of 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted with the directors using the same set of open questions.

Results

For the study, 25 semi-structured interviews were conducted between March 2019 and June 2020. The interview questions were based on the three elements in Voltolini's theoretical model: the role of the NSAs as seen in their actions; the frames for these actions; and the levels – national, international, or supranational – where the actions were carried out and the targets selected. Questions were also asked about human and financial resources and the liaising mechanisms with the Polisario Front.

In addition to the capacity to influence ascribed to each NSA, it was important to take into account both the setting and a number of local and international factors that put the actions of the NSAs into perspective. For instance, the increased emphasis on natural resources has been due, in part, to a change in the political, social, and economic context around Western Sahara. In 2001, Morocco began to grant licenses for the exploration and later exploitation of oil and gas in the waters adjacent to the territory. At the same time, almost 10 years had passed since the signing of the Settlement Plan between Morocco and the Polisario Front, a new monarch, Mohamed VI, had acceded to the throne in 1999, and the exploitation of other resources apart from fisheries had begun. The United Nations reacted by producing the 2002 Corell Report, written by Under-Secretary-General for Legal Affairs Hans Corell, which established the right of the Sahrawi people to its resources and the need to obtain their consensus for the exploitation of those resources by the 'administrative power' (the debate was generated by the consideration of Morocco as a de facto administrative power in violation of international law, a situation that continues to this time). At certain points between 2005 and 2010, the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, in turn, put the granting of exploration and exploitation licenses to international companies at the centre of its foreign policy, due to both the economic wealth involved and international views about the conflict. According to one of the interviewees, a representative of the Polisario Front (E 20), there was a change towards soft diplomacy based on the right of the Sahrawi people to the territory's natural resources in 2007, after Morocco presented

an Autonomy Plan to resolve the Sahara conflict to the UN that left no room for negotiations on including a referendum as a fundamental element of the self-determination process (on the other hand, one of the most important NSAs in the area of natural resources, Western Sahara Research Watch, had already begun operations three years earlier, in 2004). Farther abroad, when the Crimean Peninsula was annexed by Russia in 2014, alarms went off in reaction to seeing the risks of trading with resources from occupied territories, and major investors took a closer look at doing business in situations of occupation. At the same time, Israel has felt itself to be treated unfairly by the EU in comparison with Morocco, which is granted more 'flexibility' in its accords, even though it incorporates products from Western Sahara, which Israel does not do in the case of Palestine (E 4).

The new frame – in Voltolini's terminology – in Western Sahara involved the turn to legal recourses after the EU-Moroccan Fisheries Partnership Agreement was signed in 2012, and the 2015 resolution and 2018 sentences were published by the EU Court of Justice. After the most recent agreement between the EU and Morocco was signed in February 2019, Polisario Front lawyer Gilles Devers was quick to react. The economic importance of the natural resources and their impact on other non-state actors, like companies interested in trading Sahrawi resources, form part of this new frame. This is especially true of the emphasis on the violation of the rights of the Sahrawi people, since Morocco has taken advantage of its status as an occupying power in the territory to exploit and benefit from resources without the consent of the Sahrawis. The reaction to Morocco's actions has been stronger than with the Polisario Front's earlier diplomatic strategy of denouncing the lack of a self-determination referendum.

The results of the study are presented sequentially, analysing the interviews done with each individual NSA.

(1) Western Sahara Resource Watch (WSRW)

From the four interviews done with the activists at WSRW, it is clear that this NGO falls into the category of voice-articulator, since its actions can be defined as political information. The group focuses on dialogue, and on answering questions from other non-state actors and the Polisario Front. Its aim is to create a database for each NGO in its network to use where and however it wants. Of particular importance at this time is the rapid growth of renewable energies in Western Sahara, on which Spain and the EU will someday be dependent. WSRW's forms of interaction range from collaborative to contentious, although this depends on the individual. For example, when the European Parliament was voting to renew the EU-Moroccan Fisheries Partnership Agreement, WSRW lobbied for years and even promoted protests in front of the Moroccan Embassy in Belgium. The aim of these

informative campaigns was to influence civil society to change its opinion and to educate young people, especially in Norway. Its style, then, is a mixture of argumentation and negotiation, but not confrontation. In the case of oil and gas and, particularly, phosphates, the group has managed to decrease the number of vessels transporting phosphates, the number of companies importing them, and the amount of money that Morocco brings in. Although some companies remain in New Zealand and Sweden, in most of the other cases, they have stopped transporting and importing phosphate from Western Sahara. WSRW does not lobby directly, but works through its affiliates, and thanks to its networking, it is able to raise parliamentary questions on the exploitation of natural resources in many countries. It also compiles information on the activity of boats transporting phosphates and follows the export of fish oil on the Internet.

Other targets of its actions include some companies that are more receptive to its demands because they are concerned about maintaining the image of a corporation that respects ethical principles. The group's influence on political representatives is more difficult to assess because they pursue additional agendas. WSRW also works with investment funds and banks. With politicians, the group says that in 24 h it is able to distribute its position to 400 Members of Parliament (MEPs) in their own language, thanks to a network of volunteers (E 4). The Internet is a valuable tool where they post news and, most importantly, the reports that provide information to the Sahrawis – despite the difficulty of translating documents into Arabic – and many ministers of foreign affairs. Their style is not to criticise from the outset, but to send letters and wait for responses and reactions from the companies. The role of the media is very important (E 2) and WSRW tries to reach its representatives, but it is not always easy to raise the topic in the international section.

The frame is mixed, based on well-written technical reports with a significant amount of information compiled firsthand, but also with a political angle, since the ultimate aim is to support the self-determination process. To that end, the group has mounted campaigns against companies and lobbied the European Parliament. When financial problems arose, they expanded their audience and attracted the attention of other stakeholders (E 2). Their level, in turn, is that of the European Parliament (although it is difficult to work with MEPs, they recognise (E1) this it is easier than convincing a civil servant or diplomat). If WSRW is seen as a network of NGOs created in 2004, each individual part usually acts nationally and has its own interests. As volunteers do the group's work, it is harder to act on more levels, as they would need more workers to reach the companies involved.

The group has only one full-time employee at the headquarters in Brussels, who directs the actions in the European Parliament, working with volunteers from other NGOs. Since 2012, and particularly since 2015 when the CJEU handed down its sentences, there has been an increase in interest and in

the work done by Sahrawi civil society regarding natural resources. WSRW has very little public financing and its budget is covered by contributions from other NGOs and member fees. The Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation gave them €4,000 for their annual report on phosphate exploitation.

The organisation's institutionalised feedback mechanisms with the Polisario Front are rather informal and unsystematic. Instead, they focus on questions asked by Sahrawis about the opportuneness of specific measures in response to EU agreements or company actions. Within their network of NGOs, some have closer ties to the Polisario Front than others, but in no case is there any political or financial dependence on the PF or Algeria (as claimed by the Moroccans in E 4 and E 1).

(2) Western Sahara Campaign United Kingdom (WSC UK)

Two interviews were conducted with Western Sahara Campaign United Kingdom, whose role is best described as a voice-articulator, although some of its activities could be classified as those of an opponent. Fundamentally, this group concentrates on lobbying the British Foreign Office, while also working to change the minds of undecided MEPs (E 5), and organise letter-writing campaigns to the government. The group also lodged an appeal with the High Court of Justice of England, which recognised the NGO's capacity to present the demand. According to an interviewee (E 6), legal cases are the only way to approach Morocco's illegal exploitation of Saharan natural resources. The group's frame, therefore, is mixed, including highly specialised technical arguments and the ability to file an appeal, alongside political criteria, like pursuing an end to illegal exploitation and the Moroccan occupation of Western Sahara.

As with WSRW, WSC UK is notable for the broad impact of its activities and for being able to reach the media, despite the difficulty entailed in introducing the subject of Western Sahara, and all with limited full-time human resources to conduct campaigns or lobby and little funding. In fact, WSC UK lobbies a government with little historical or economic involvement with Western Sahara (Britain, for example, has no interest in the area's fisheries). Only agricultural products, particularly tomatoes, have been spotlighted in some campaigns. Under Jeremy Corbyn, the Labour Party took more interest in the Sahrawi people, occasionally supporting their demands (E 6). In recent years, the group has found a new ally in the Scottish National Party, which is more inclined to express its sympathy with an unfinished self-determination process (in interviews, the directors of the Catalonian NGO NOVACT also indicated that funding and support from Catalonian institutions, including the autonomous government and Barcelona City Council, are due to the same

heightened awareness about the situation [E 13]). The work that WSC UK does with political parties is technical in nature, providing them with the necessary information on complex subjects like international law and trade (E 5).

Regarding the liaising mechanisms behind the NGO's relationship with the Polisario Front, WSC UK has participated at the European Conference of Support and Solidarity with the Sahrawi People (EUCOCO) and WSRW general assemblies, but the organisation emphasises its independence (E 5). The group also recognises the recent shift in the PF strategy towards legal action to defend its rights to natural resources.

(3) Western Sahara Campaign New Zealand (WSC NZ)

The focus of this NGO is organising protests against companies that import and transport phosphates to New Zealand. They work in close collaboration with other groups like WSC UK and the Australian Western Sahara Association. They use collaboration and dialogue in their conversations with different government departments affected by the import of phosphates, but they have also joined small vessels in leading protest actions against the large ships carrying Sahrawi phosphate. The group's style, therefore, is characterised by arguing and contestation with direct actions. Their targets are 'whoever who wants to listen to them' (E 7), and the group is aware of its limited impact, especially on public opinion in general. They have been signatories to letters protesting companies and waged legal campaigns. This is one of the few NSAs that recognises the emotional element of its frames. As New Zealand was colonised by the British and is somewhat sensitive to questions related to decolonisation, its farmers, for example, can understand the Sahrawis' claims. They generally act at the national level, largely protesting New Zealand companies and lobbying the country's government, although they have taken a stance against the Australian government. At times, the New Zealand Labour Party has also shown greater sensitivity towards Sahrawi demands.

The budget and staff of WSC NZ are supplied by contributions and donations and volunteers. In the 1980s, New Zealand civil society was characterised by an important anti-nuclear mobilisation movement, and WSC NZ has benefitted from the vacuum left behind as an association and activist organisation. The NGO sees that, like WSRW and WSC UK, it has a clear influence on Polisario Front strategies (E 7). At EUCOCO meetings, such as the conference held in Seville in 2001, the PF listened to and shared its concerns with the NSAs. This was later reflected in a shift in strategy by the movement.

(4) Australian Western Sahara Association (AWSA)

Australian Western Sahara Association is a voice-articulator, whose actions largely consist of emailing information and news to politicians. However, they also follow boats carrying phosphate, an activity complicated by the difficulty of establishing their arrival times. They have demonstrated against companies and the boats importing phosphate, but always in a collaborative way, sending information to the actors involved and using argumentation. The group's style, then, is mixed and its actions make use of both cooperation and confrontation (E 8). Australia had once imported phosphate from Western Sahara via three private and two public companies. In collaboration with WSRW, the Australian Western Sahara Association became 'advisors' on issues related to corporate ethics. Australia then ceased importing phosphates through Australian companies, making it one of the most successful cases. The interviewee characterised the NGO's style as one of confrontation, perhaps filling the role of opponent, although somewhat more persuasive: 'more friendship than political lobby' (E 8).

AWSA targets members of the Australian Parliament and executives at import companies. They have also often reached out to the authorities at the ports where boats carrying phosphate arrive (E 8). As in the case of the interviewee from WSC NZ, they emphasise that they are open to whoever wants to listen to them, although they are aware of how difficult it is to engage the general public with a topic so far removed from Australia and, consequently, try to meet with journalists and appear on television. Their frame is clearly technical, and the group recognises that subjects like popular claims and trade in 'stolen goods' (E 8) require empirical evidence, which is why they track companies and port arrivals in Australia. The NGO acts at the national level with the Australian Parliament, large companies, and even the Green Party. However, AWSA has also played an international role, participating with the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) and writing letters to the Security Council when the mandate is up for renewal. The group has also worked with the United Nations Human Rights Council in Geneva. The NSA has two headquarters, the older one in Sydney and a second in Melbourne. Created in 2000, AWSA is only staffed by volunteers and its budget is covered by donations and money raised at different events, like banquets and festivals.

It has no formalised mechanisms for working with the Polisario Front, but its members do work closely with a PF representative in Sydney who is kept up to date about the organisation's activities. The interviewee at AWSA recognised that, of all the NSAs, WSRW has some influence over the Polisario Front, although this was not institutionalised until 2004. While Emhamed Khadad, the long-time driving force behind the Polisario Front's use of the courts to defend its natural resources, required the assistance of lawyers, WSRW had

an influence as well. This was seen clearly at the EUCOCO held in Seville in November 2001, where the Polisario Front changed its strategy as a consequence of meetings held with the NGOs there. At that meeting, a workshop on a natural resource campaign was organised by Stephanie Brennan from Sydney. 'She talked about a successful campaign against an underwear company (I think it was Triumph) that stopped manufacturing brassieres in Burma under its military regime' (E 8). In 2002, the interviewee participated with lawyer Jeffrey Smith in a one-day conference in Brussels where Smith spoke about maritime borders and met with the president of the SADR at that time, Mohamed Abdelaziz. He also attended a two-day workshop on resources in Algeria in July 2002 held by the Algerian National Committee for Solidarity with the Sahrawi People (CNASPS) (E 8). In other words, this strategic turn towards defending natural resources began taking shape in the early 2000s, influenced by the interest of American and French companies in the oil and gas exploration being offered by Morocco.

(5) Emmaus Stockholm

This NSA began to focus on the question of natural resources in 2010 when the group decided to concentrate more on advocacy and communication and less on cooperation. At first, Emmaus called for Sweden to recognise the SADR as a state, but in 2012 the group became aware that the Swedish executive branch was not going to take that step – despite the Parliamentary vote in favour of the move – and began its campaigns and activities on behalf of natural resources. Its primary targets are the Swedish politicians and MEPS who operate under strict transparency criteria and, generally speaking, the NGO has encountered a significant degree of awareness about the negative aspects of the exploitation of natural resources. For this reason, the goals of Emmaus (here considered to be operating at the international level in the European Parliament, although its legal status is that of an association) have largely been reached. This NGO can be classified as a dialogue-builder, since it has access to political representatives and uses strategies that are more cooperative and based on dialogue. The fact remains, however, that Emmaus would like to connect with the public (by, for instance, disseminating news and collaborating with the press in the hope of opening the political debate) and they have organised conferences, events, and courses. In recent years, the group has provided spaces for dialogue with banks and the major pension funds. Emmaus Stockholm has also reached out to young students to educate them about Western Sahara's resources, particularly through agriculture campaigns that highlight tomatoes. This NSA also falls into the category of opponent, thanks to their 2011 campaign, 'sun, sand, and torture', and their work against large supermarket chains and

providers regarding product labelling for goods that come from Western Sahara but are marketed as Moroccan.

Having shifted their focus from more political criteria, like the recognition of the SADR, to more technical work, like education and labelling campaigns, Emmaus Stockholm's frame can be classified as mixed. Their level ranges from the state and national political parties to the European Parliament, while they take advantage of the lobbying work done by WSRW and also lobby Swedish MEPs. Emmaus Stockholm's structure is based on volunteers and their funding comes from public agencies, in addition to donations and the sale of used clothing.

To a question about feedback mechanisms and the degree of influence with the Polisario Front, an interviewee (E 9) responded that at the 2018 EUCOCO meeting, the Sahrawis themselves agreed to give greater priority to the question of natural resources and that, consequently, Emmaus also opted to give more support to the Polisario Front and the Sahrawi associations that endorsed these demands. The interviewee also affirmed that the NSA has some indirect influence on the PF, as evidenced by the fact that the movement began to concentrate on legal channels after the publication of a report on tomatoes in 2014. The interviewee also argued that the role of WSRW had become superfluous, because the Polisario Front had adopted this important strategic line in the face of the diplomatic stalemate in the conflict (E 9).

(6) *Équipe Média*

Équipe Média is a Sahrawi media organisation (E 10) that connects with solidarity movements, the media, and social networks from the underground, since Morocco has deemed the organisation illegal. In fact, the group has been persecuted and repressed, and six journalists are currently in prison. The group documents human rights violations and the exploitation of natural resources. Given its actions and its tracking of anti-exploitation campaigns, both their own and those organised by other NSAs, the role of the NGO is at times that of an opponent and, at other times, a voice-articulator, when its work involves compiling and disseminating documentation and information on human rights violations and exploitation. Since its main target is the general public, the group collaborates with media organisations like the Spanish agency EFE. They have also sent letters and, above all, photographs to some companies (such as New Zealand phosphate importers), condemning them on behalf of the Sahrawi people. *Équipe Media* also collaborates with WSRW, providing reports and documentation.

The organisation primarily acts at the level of the European Parliament and with the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva, which meets three times a year, where their activists always participate in coordination with the Polisario

Front delegation and NGOs such as *France Liberté* and the American Association of Jurists (E 10). *Équipe Media* has done work in Italy, Denmark, Sweden, Norway, Spain, and France. The organisation has 25 members (camera operators, editors, journalists, etc.), all volunteers. Financing for this nonprofit organisation comes from donations of material and contributions from associations that support the Sahrawi people. In many cases, their material is donated, as described in their recent award-winning documentary, 'Three Stolen Cameras' (E 10).

The NSA's degree of influence over the Polisario Front can be seen in the critical reaction of the Sahrawis to Moroccan exploitation of their natural resources in 2001–03 as a violation of their economic rights. In this circumstance, the Polisario Front was able to count on associations supporting the Sahrawi people. Later, the PF chose to pursue a very 'important and effective' path (E 10) against companies and states: the judicial process. In their complaints, the Polisario Front relied on the activism of Sahrawi and international civil society, including WSRW and WSC UK.

(7) *Centre d'Études et de Documentation Franco-Sahraoui, Ahmed Baba MISKE*

This new French think tank was created in 2018 with the unpaid collaboration of researchers who assemble their documents and reports. The *Centre* is a voice-articulator, because it does research into companies connected to the exploitation of natural resources. Its style is more collaborative and academic and its work is aimed at other researchers, NGOs, and companies that wish to consult the NSA about the management and exploitation of natural resources. Its frame is technical and the group is not interested in working with the mass media.

The *Centre* is in constant contact with the Sahrawi diplomatic representation in France and, from time to time, maintains informal contact with French MEPs. Although they do no institutionalised networking with the other non-state actors, at times they communicate with WSRW and WSC UK, as well as with academics and researchers.

(8) International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT) and Observatory of Human Rights and Business (ODHE)

The International Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT) is a Catalonian NGO that can be considered a voice-articulator or opponent, according to the activities it is engaged in at a particular time. The Observatory of Human Rights and Business (ODHE) (as explained by interviewees E 12, E 13, and E 14), is the NGO's research branch. Although it has no legal status, it does have a corporate frame and is well known for its report on fisheries, '*Los Tentáculos de la ocupación* [The Tentacles of Occupation]'. NOVACT can

be considered a voice-articulator when it creates technical and political spaces for collaboration with civil servants on questions like the recent campaign on public procurement (E 13). One interviewee observed with regard to the renewal of the EU-Morocco Fisheries Partnership Agreement that NOVACT needs more time and should have collaborated better with Swiss and French NGOs in its campaign before the European Parliament between 2018 and 2019. However, NOVACT has taken action as an opponent against companies and governments. One interviewee argued that it is easier to work with companies to dissuade them from trading in situations of international illegality, because they want to protect their reputations, as opposed to politicians, who are juggling different agendas. Despite NOVACT's role as an opponent, however, its style is at times less confrontational, because they study and contact companies before staging a boycott or embarking upon a campaign.

NOVACT targets MEPs and political parties. The group has found that nationalist parties are usually more sympathetic to the Sahara question. Reaching public opinion is another one of their general objectives, although – as noted by other interviewees – it can be difficult to convince the traditional media to include news about the plunder of Sahrawi natural resources. NOVACT's most recent efforts have concentrated on educating members of Sahrawi civil society to launch and run their own anti-exploitation campaigns, in which they themselves decide what companies to target and whether they should also focus on consumers or investors. In light of these actions, the interviewees themselves define their frame as more technical – E 13 noted that they use technical language because that is what European and national politicians understand – than political, although they recognise (E 14) that they work with a strong emotional component that attracts the interest and empathy of citizens, especially when the media is involved. They also gather news and other information on the ground to provide empirical evidence (E 12).

The group's most important level to date has been the autonomous community of Catalonia. NOVACT and ODHE have managed to create a solid workspace with the Catalonia Parliamentary Group, which has allowed them to bring Sahrawi delegations from the camps, the occupied territories, and the diaspora. As a result, they have been able to introduce important declarations (agenda-setting, E 13 and E 14) in support of self-determination. The central government and some consulates abroad have consulted with the group, as they have offices in Jordan, Tunisia, and Spain (Barcelona and Madrid). At the European level, they have worked to persuade some Spanish parties of their cause, especially Esquerra per Catalunya (E 14). Finally, at the international level, they have participated in the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

Some 65 per cent of NOVACT's funding is public, largely from the Barcelona City Council, the Extremadura Cooperation Agency and, for some projects, the European Commission and United Nations. Approximately 35 per cent is private financing from institutes like the Open Society Foundations (E 14). This NSA has a large staff, with at least five members working on natural resources, one in communications. The organisation has a very 'strong' social network presence and employs innovative media strategies like the video that accompanied 'The Tentacles of Occupation' report. The NSA estimates its success rate with regard to its goals to be roughly 40 per cent (E 14). As the group only began to work with Western Saharan resources six years ago, its members feel a need for more networking, especially with WSRW and other European NSAs, in order to exert more pressure (the group did join others in the 2018 programme to harvest rice and raise awareness about plunder, 'Sahara Rice'). On the international level, the group has found more receptiveness to the issue of resources than to calls for a self-determination referendum (E 13). NOVACT and ODHE have both worked with the Centre for Research on Multinational Corporations (SOMO) to map the companies involved in exploitation and with the development NGO Mundubat to strengthen their media campaigns (E 13).

When discussing its relationship with the Polisario Front, NOVACT emphasises the movement's tendency to centralise activities and the fact that any initiative planned in the camps, for example, must receive the approval of the PF. Consequently, NOVACT has had to establish spaces of trust with the Polisario Front in order to conduct training and outreach activities with Sahrawi civil society. As the Polisario Front has pursued legal action against transnational companies and centralised strategic litigation with the assistance of lawyers, NSAs like NOVACT limit themselves to collaboration. When the PF opts for legal action, NOVACT will work with civil society and companies, but on an emotional, rather than a legal, level. The NSA may create the conditions to undertake an anti-exploitation campaign, but it does not decide on the target. They create the space and provide the necessary resources and training for the Sahrawis to choose their own targets (E 14). From this perspective, NOVACT has some influence.

(9) Sahrawi Campaign Against the Plunder (SCAP)

Since 2015, Sahrawi Campaign against the Plunder has been working in the refugee camps in Tindouf, overseeing small mobilisations against the exploitation of natural resources and campaigns against specific companies, most recently the United States energy company KOSMOS. The interviewee representing the group discussed the difficulty of working with little funding; they are currently using a drone to better and more safely track boats, transportation, and exportation of all types of resources by Morocco. The group's

interaction is characterised by confrontation and contestation, placing it in the category of opponent.

The NSA's target audience extends beyond public opinion, as they try to mobilise the local media (E 15) and reach out to students, civil society, the Polisario Front, and political advisers. Their activities are largely limited to talks and briefings in the camps and organising protests. The association provides material in the form of photographs, images, and documents for its network in Switzerland, New Zealand, and Canada – as well as WSRW – to use it in their reports. Its frame is therefore mixed between the technical, political, and emotional categories: the compilation and provision of information is technical, but its media outreach and campaigns are political and/or emotional. The group also provides information to the companies that contact the NSA before signing an agreement with Morocco (E 15). Its level is local, focusing on solidarity movements with the Sahrawi people, Polisario Front diplomacy, and the associations in the occupied territories who need assistance coordinating their work. Finally, its influence (E 15) on the Polisario Front consists of including a new issue, that of food sovereignty, on the political agenda (E 15).

(10) Diaspora Coordinator Against the Plunder

This coordinator of civil society during the diaspora is best known for leading actions against European Union institutions after sentences are handed down by the CJEU. It also compiles information and organises campaigns and solidarity actions. Its European-level targets are the Council, the Committee, and the Parliament. Because of its more persuasive, cooperative style – and despite its campaigns and interest in public opinion – this is a voice-articulator. The NSA's specific activities include letter-writing, passing news to the media, and meeting with key actors, such as members of the European Parliament Committee on Fisheries (E 16). It often prepares the letters for MEPs and NGOs to sign, indicating their support for the cause.

The NSA's frame is a mix between technical and political, because it uses legal criteria to protest the agreements signed between the EU and Morocco without the consent of the Sahrawi people. In these situations, the coordinator provides empirical evidence, but also appeals to questions both political (using a distinctive language when operating as an interlocutor) and emotional when the NSA chose, for example, to quote Bob Dylan to emphasise that the rights of the Sahrawi people are not a concession, and that they must take what is being denied them (E 16). In addition to the Commission and, especially, the Parliament, the coordinator lobbies the permanent delegations in Brussels from other countries.

The coordinator does not receive public financing; when it operates in Brussels, it has joined forces with other NGOs like WSRW and the Collective

of Sahrawi Human Rights Defenders (CODESA), although the interviewee representing the NSA recognised that it has no formal mechanisms to network with others. Regarding its influence over the Polisario Front, the interviewee responded that the PF has been acting, including militarily, to fight against the illegal exploitation of natural resources since the 1970s (E 16).

(11) Association for the Monitoring of Resources and the Protection of the Environment in Western Sahara (AMRPEWS)

This NSA provides the media with information on economic and geographical issues and carries out protest actions in Western Sahara related to the exploitation of its resources (E 17). They worked with the Global Legal Action Network on an appeal lodged against oil and gas companies (E 17), and can be classified as a voice-articulator. AMRPEWS moves in a mixed frame, between technical, based on its legal work, and political, when the group, for example, sued the UN to create mechanisms that would make it possible to know the who, how, and where of the exploitation of Sahrawi natural resources. The organisation also has a strong emotional component, using photographs and videos to condemn abuse.

AMRPEWS lobbies the European Commission and Parliament through MEPS who visit the occupied territories, in addition to the British delegation (E 17). The organisation relies on volunteers and it is often forced to work underground due to persecution by the Moroccan authorities (E 17). AMRPEWS began to work more formally in 2015, but without funding. Their material, such as cameras and mobile phones, is the property of the volunteers. Their networking is largely limited to GLAN and NOVACT.

With regard to their relationship with the Polisario Front, its representative responded 'our political interest is self-determination, but [the PF] is the legal representative and it works on political questions. We focus on international law […] and against companies […] to stop plunder' (E 17).

(12) Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG)

This Spanish organisation of farmers and livestock owners provides information to the public and lobbies the EU Commission, Council, and Parliament, the Spanish government (particularly the Ministry of Agriculture), and Spanish administrations (E 18). These actions are motivated by the group's opposition to the Association Agreement (AA) signed between the EU and Morocco, arguing that it is detrimental to the interests of Spanish farmers, livestock owners, and citizens in general who do not know the real – Western Saharan – source of products imported from Morocco. In addition to its lobbying, COAG sends press releases with the aim of influencing public

opinion (E 18) and can be considered a voice-articulator. Its specific actions include participating in a 2018 workshop in the European Parliament with WSRW.

The group on its own has a limited capacity to influence, but it did manage to put the question of the renewal of the AA on the EU agenda and, above all, attract the attention of politicians and the media (E 18) (although their goal was not met in the end, with the renewed Agreement being signed in February 2019). COAG's frame is clearly technical, although some of the organisation's press releases broach more political issues, such as when it highlighted the potential harm of the AA for economic interests in Spain and the other EU member states. As noted, the group works at the EU levels, with the Parliament and Commission (where it has found some receptive parties, like the Greens) (E 18) and EU delegations (staging mobilisations and protests in front of the EU delegation in Madrid). At the state level, its actions are largely focused on the Ministry of Agriculture.

COAG's relationship with the Polisario Front – and the group's capacity to influence the movement – has been limited to a few meetings set up to share information. However, the NSA has no real way of knowing whether or not they have exercised any influence over the Polisario Front and, moreover, modifying the diplomatic strategy of the PF is not amongst their goals (E 18).

(13) Asociación Canaria de Amistad con el Pueblo Saharaui (ACAPS)

The Canary Island organisation ACAPS coordinates with other organisations on a regular basis, particularly with associations of friends of the Sahara within the framework of the state coordinator. Founded in 1975, this was the first NSA to work in this area created in Spain. It relies on private funding in the form of member payments, but also receives public assistance from the Canary Island councils for specific projects. Its actions related to holding 24-hour vigils in front of the Spanish supermarket chain Mercadona for selling Sahrawi fish and filing complaints place the group in the category of opponent, as does its effective protest against the illegal import of sand from Western Sahara. As a voice-articulator, the group successfully put the issue on the local agenda in Lanzarote, although it was unable to prevent the import of sand in the end. These actions are perhaps best known because of their ability to affect tourism and alter the image of the Canary Island beaches. However, the import of sand for Canary companies remains a regular, albeit little-known, practice.

The group has also written letters of complaint to port authorities, as well as to local, autonomous community, and state leaders. Its actions range from protests (demonstrations around the boat that imports sand resulted in fines of up to €60,000, which were later reduced) to tracking and documenting the trafficking of natural resources, particularly regarding the supply of oil to

fishing vessels and boats involved in importing phosphates. ACAPS's targets also include the parliamentary intergroup that is most responsive to their concerns.

The organisation supports the Polisario Front on legal matters, providing information for the complaints filed. However, its representatives do not know the degree to which they may have influenced the activists or the PF during the highly publicised protests in the occupied territories in 2010, though they believe they may have had some impact in the events at Gdeim Izik.

(14) Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)

The Global Legal Action Network, which was created in 2014, bought a claim against the oil and gas exploration company San Leon Energy in October 2018. In this act, GLAN was supported by three other NGOs: Sahrawi Campaign Against the Plunder, AMRPEWS, and the Sahrawi Committee for the Protection of Natural Resources (CSPRON), as well as the Polisario Front. The GLAN network is supported by the work of university affiliates and lawyers who oppose the occupation. The group's members usually work voluntarily – at times their tasks coincide with their interests as academics or lawyers – and only two full-time employees are currently on staff. Its funding is scarce and it counts on the contributions of its own members, with occasional additional support for specific projects. The group is both a dialogue-builder (with a view to empowering the Polisario Front), but also acts as an opponent when filing complaints before the courts. It tends to use argumentation and, despite its legal actions, recognises that although everything is political, emotions and feelings lay behind its arguments. Some of GLAN's actions are aimed at educating young people and researchers in universities, but the main targets of its work are the states, the EU, and specific companies (E 20).

Although the organisation's frame is fundamentally technical, it is really mixed. GLAN continues to be concerned about the occupation of the territory but, as in the Palestinian case, their work in this respect is not producing the desired results. Accordingly, the group currently advocates taking action against the annexation instead. They work at the national level, primarily in Ireland where they have their headquarters, and the United Kingdom. Their upcoming activity, which will probably take place in France, will require the cooperation of local agents. In any case, GLAN's most successful collaboration is with WSRW and WSC UK. The group prefers to work at the national level, which comes with more guarantees than international jurisprudence, and also allows them to focus on economic and financial issues.

Regarding the group's feedback mechanisms with the Polisario Front and their amount of influence, GLAN emphasises the importance of personal

Table 2. The Analyses of Non-State Actors, a Summary.

NSA	Status	Location	Funding	Staff	Role	Frame	Level	Influence/Feedback
Western Sahara Research Watch (WSRW)	NGO	Belgium	Almost no public funding	1 staff member, volunteers	V-A	Mixed (technical/ political)	Europe	Few formal feedback mechanisms; stresses independence
Western Sahara Campaign UK (WSC UK)	NGO	United Kingdom	No public funding	1 staff member, volunteers	V-A and O	Technical	National (UK gov't); some MEPS	Participation in EUCOCO, WSRW assemblies; stresses independence but recognises shift towards judicial channels to defend right to resources
Western Sahara Campaign NZ (WSC NZ)	NGO	New Zealand	Private	Volunteer	V-A and O	Political	National; international against Australian companies	Feedback mechanism: EUCOCO; influence through NGOs like WSRW and WSC UK
Australian Western Sahara Association (AWSA)	Assoc.	Australia	Private	Volunteer	V-A	Technical	National and companies	No formal working mechanisms with PF, but works closely with PF representative in Sidney; at 2001 EUCOCO, changed PF strategy after meetings with NGOs; clearest influence: WSRW
Emmaus Stockholm	NGO	Sweden	Funding from public agencies, donations and sale of used clothing	Volunteer	D-B	Mixed	National and Swedish MEPs	Mechanisms: 2018 EUCOCO; some indirect influence on the PF
Équipe Media	Media organisation	Occupied Territories	Private	Volunteer	O, at times V-A	Mixed	Europe; international (Geneva)	PF has counted on their activism, international and Sahrawi civil society backing; quite powerful WSRW campaigns
Centre d'Études et de Documentation Franco-Sahraoui, Ahmed Baba MISKE	Think tank	France	n/a	Volunteer	V-A	Technical	National	Contacts with diplomatic representation in France
Int'l Institute for Nonviolent Action (NOVACT-ODHE)	NGO	Spain	65% public funding	Permanent paid staff	V-A and O	Technical and political	National (Catalonia); Europe (Parliament); Geneva	Mechanism: 'Sahara Rice' campaign; has influence
Sahrawi Campaign Against the Plunder (SCAP)	NGO	Camps	n/a	n/a	O	Mixed: technical and political/ emotional	National; international (provides information to NGOs and international companies)	Has influence (agenda setting with a new issue: food sovereignty)

(*Continued*)

Table 2. Continued.

NSA	Status	Location	Funding	Staff	Role	Frame	Level	Influence/Feedback
Diaspora Coordinator Against the Plunder	Assoc.	Diaspora (Belgium)	Private	n/a	V-A	Mixed: technical and political/ emotional	Europe; permanent delegations, Brussels	No influence (PF took military actions against plunder in 1970s)
Association for the Monitoring of Resources and Protection of the Environment in Western *Sahara (AMRPEWS)*	NGO	Occupied Territories	Private	Volunteer	V-A	Mixed: technical and political/ emotional	Europe	Networks with GLAN and NOVACT
Coordinadora de Organizaciones de Agricultores y Ganaderos (COAG)	Professional farmers and livestock owners organisation	Spain	n/a	n/a	V-A	Technical	Europe (and delegations in Madrid); national (Ministry of Agriculture)	Limited contacts; no factors to determine influence
Asociación Canaria de Amistad con el Pueblo Saharaui (ACAPS)	Assoc.	Spain	Private and public (Canary Island councils) for specific projects	Volunteer	O and V-A	Political	National (intergroup and autonomous community)	Level and scope of influence unknown, especially beyond PF
Global Legal Action Network (GLAN)	NGO	Ireland	Private	2 full-time staff members; volunteers	V-A and O	Mixed: largely technical, but draws on emotional	National, mainly Ireland and UK	Weak, inoperative institutionalised relations; strategies determined by personal relationships; very independent
TOTAL					6 V-A 5 V-A + O 1 O 1 D-B 1 D-B + O	8 mixed; 2 political; 4 technical	7 national 4 Europe 3 national + international	Some relationship: 10 None: 2 Unknown: 1 Independent: 1

Source: Compiled by author

relationships. The NSA and its representative form part of an advisory board that met more than a year ago, although nothing further has come of the meeting. The interviewee observed that the few legally recognised NGOs should focus more on documenting 'facts and events' than on fighting over compliance with legislation (Table 2).

Conclusion

It is clear from the analysis of the NSAs focused on claiming the right of the Sahrawi people to their natural resources that they operate in or between the categories established by Voltolini (2016). Regarding the first element, their role, 6 of the 14 NSAs can be categorised as voice-articulators, 5 as voice-articulators/opponents, 1 as a dialogue-builder, and one as an opponent/dialogue-builder. In other words, the actions undertaken by most of the organisations are political and range between argumentation and confrontation targeted at policy-makers or executives of the large companies that trade in Sahrawi resources. A total of 8 NSAs operate in a mixed, technical/political frame, as opposed to 4 whose frame is only technical, and 2 whose frame is strictly political. Regarding the level, 7 of the NSAs operate at the national level, 4 at the EU level (primarily the Parliament and Commission), and three at both the national and international levels.

The question regarding feedback mechanisms between the NSAs and the Polisario Front showed that while no formal or institutionalised mechanisms exist, the organisations have access to some regular meeting points like the EUCOCO conferences, the 'Sahara Rice' campaign, and meetings of the UN Council of Human Rights in Geneva. Some of the interviewees (E 6 and E 7) mentioned the EUCOCO conference held in Seville in 2001 as a key turning point in the Polisario Front strategy, as was the 2018 Sahara Rice campaign.

Throughout the entire process of developing new frames, Western Sahara Research Watch played an outstanding role, networking and collaborating with almost all the NSAs interviewed, except for AMRPEWS (which worked with GLAN and NOVACT). WSRW not only has an impact on the other NSAs by preparing campaigns, establishing strategies, and providing information and expertise, but also influences the Polisario Front, as observed by a number of the interviewees (E 7, E 8, E 9). These informants work with NSAs in New Zealand, Australia, and Sweden, the last two of which have been the most successful with regard to reducing the number of companies that trade Western Saharan resources.

Only two NSAs (Diaspora Coordinator Against the Plunder and AMRPEWS) said they have no influence over the Polisario Front, while COAG stated that it had no way of knowing. WSRW actively emphasises its independence from the PF, while the others (10 out of 14) recognise having some influence, especially the representatives of WSC UK, WSC NZ, AWSA and Emmaus

Stockholm. The analysis shows that there is clearly some influence related to the first step of providing information, and with regard to the second step, that of producing a change in behaviour, several activists with many years of experience witnessed a change in the Polisario Front's strategy after it began to meet with NSAs in 2001.

The question about the influence of NSAs on the Polisario Front elicited a diversity of reactions from the interviewees. None of the NSAs identified this as a goal and none of them include the Polisario Front or the SADR amongst their targets. Neither is there any connection via funding of any sort, although the informal mechanisms of communication, information, and meetings do exist, as discussed above. This particular query seemed to make some of the interviewees uncomfortable, which could be related to a question of 'pride' (E 3); may have been seen as Eurocentric or neocolonial – implying that the Polisario Front requires guidance from Western organisations; or could have been seen to indicate an inability to understand independence and autonomy in the face of political interference. However, after considering whether to include the question in the survey, the decision was made to keep it in, based on the suppositions that undergird constructivism, in which strategies are redefined by interactions between different state and non-state actors.

The recognition of the Sahrawi people's permanent sovereignty over Western Sahara's natural resources follows from the principle of self-determination and has clear financial, geostrategic, political, and social consequences that attract the attention of public policy-makers. The shift to economic demands has substantially changed the perception of the conflict in Western Sahara and the position taken by stakeholders regarding the exploitation of Sahrawi natural resources. Nonetheless, the NSAs' capacity to influence European institutions, especially the Commission and Council, and public opinion is low, as is its presence on the international political agenda. Only the European Parliament has been sympathetic to the question of Western Sahara, in particular certain parties like the Greens, Liberals and some nationalist parties (Catalonian, Scottish, and Welsh).

The impact of the technical work done by the NSAs can be seen in some court sentences, both at the European and national (South Africa and Panama) levels, and in the decision of some import and transportation companies to stop trading Sahrawi phosphates and agricultural products. In this respect, the most successful actions – some technical, but above all political – had repercussions in Sweden, Australia, and New Zealand. However, despite their immense impact, the degree of their success is relative, considering the financial and human resources and time spent, and a number of the NSAs discussed here recognise that many bridges remain to be crossed. More pressure must be exerted on the remaining large phosphate import companies and, above all, on the bodies of the EU to exclude Western Sahara from

fisheries and trade liberalisation agreements with Morocco or, at least, to take the consent of the Sahrawi people into consideration, conscious of the fact that the final goal of self-determination has not yet been reached.

Note

1. The research presented in this article was completed before the November 2020 outbreak of war between the Polisario Front and Morocco. At the time of writing, the Polisario Front continues to pursue a legal path towards making claims on Western Sahara's natural resources, and continued to work in partnership with many of the NSAs discussed in this paper.

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