

The aim of the research project is to determine the impact of *de facto states* (also known as quasi-states), understood as unrecognized states (such as South Ossetia, Northern Cyprus, Somaliland), on international relations and the stability of the international system. In the framework of the project a very specific case study will be analyzed – Western Sahara (Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, SADR). Planned research will thus focus on international relations in two geopolitical regions, namely Maghreb and Sahel. The main hypothesis of the project indicates that this impact is destabilizing in the political, security and socio-economic spheres. The case study of Western Sahara will also allow reaching more general conclusions and understanding of the problem of *de facto states* in international relations. Our research will focus on a critical analysis of the literature, official documents (governmental and international), and the press, as well as fieldwork in the area of Western Sahara (both: in the part occupied by Morocco and in the part controlled by the Polisario Front), in the Saharawi refugee camps in Algeria near the city of Tindouf and in the border areas in Mauritania, and in Morocco itself. An important part of research will also be a fieldwork conducted among Sahrawi diaspora communities in Europe (Spain, France, and Italy) and Spanish-Saharawi friendship societies.

The analysis will be conducted at two levels: local (the territory of Western Sahara occupied by Morocco, as well as the part controlled by Front Polisario) and regional (Maghreb and Sahel regions). The project will also consider the global level looking at a potential security threats in this part of Africa that can become problematic for the United States and their European allies (especially in the face of the recent experiences from Mali).

The project is very original since the issues it will focus on have not been addressed sufficiently either by Polish or international IR scholars. Planned research is especially valuable as it will be based on first-hand data gathered during fieldwork in the above mentioned geographical area. Moreover, although in February 2016 forty years passed since the proclamation of the Saharawi Arab Democratic Republic, the problem of the Western Sahara quasi-statehood has not been resolved yet.

The completion of the project will lead to a better understanding of a complex problem of Western Sahara's statehood, and, in a wider context, the question of the existence of so-called *de facto states* in international relations. It will contribute to the Africanist stream in both Polish and international studies on contemporary international relations.

The direct result of the project will be publication of academic articles in peer-reviewed journals. Furthermore, the completion of the project will make possible taking part in the international debate on the *de facto states* and the current political situation in Morocco and Sahel, as well as in a debate on the future of Western Sahara as a unique example of a quasi-state.