

L'ECONOMISTE

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Meriem OUDGHIRI

EMMANUEL Macron delivered a historic speech on Tuesday, October 28, 2024 at the Moroccan Parliament. A total paradigm shift in which «yesterday's lenses are outdated», with a «common project», a «new page of development», and a present and future for the Sahara that «fall within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty».

The French President's three-day visit was thus the culmination of a reconciliation that was more political than economic. Since business, the private sector, civil society, and the cultural scene have continued, impartially, to maintain what is essential.

This reunion is therefore a major event. After three years of intense tension, the two partners have reaffirmed their desire for a shared, long-term approach. It is obvious: both Morocco and France must learn to manage the environments around them together, and resist the temptation to fan the embers of painful issues. Today, the

opportunities are global and continental. Morocco's breakthrough in Africa is proof of this. On the continent, the Kingdom plays a prominent regional and geopolitical role, and this is what France has been slow to understand.

Even in the age of «I love you, I love you not», France has always been an important partner for a variety of reasons. In addition to the historical ties dear to the hearts of politicians, millions of individual links have been forged.

The fact remains, however, that the global context is undergoing a metamorphosis, and is increasingly based on interest and less and less on emotion, even between two old friends.

Everyone gives and receives, while ensuring that the exchange is balanced and uncomplicated. Except perhaps in soccer, «an area where we persist in opposing each other», to use the quip of President Macron. □

Weekly highlights

2025 Finance Bill

Billions from the World Cup



The Government has scheduled the continuation of the upgrading of football stadiums as part of Morocco's hosting of the 2025 African Football Cup and the 2030 Football World Cup. This involves in particular the comprehensive rehabilitation of stadiums in Marrakech, Agadir, Fez, Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangiers

THE Government wants to accelerate the development of sport, in particular mass sport and competitive sport, better known by the generic term high-level sport. In fact, the 2025 Finance Bill lists the main projects and measures planned as part of the action plan. For grassroots sport, the plan is to continue upgrading football stadiums in preparation for Morocco's hosting of the 2025 African Football Cup and

the 2030 Football World Cup. This involves the comprehensive rehabilitation of stadiums in Marrakech, Agadir, Fez, Rabat, Casablanca, and Tangiers. The aim is to improve the quality of these sports facilities, in addition to the construction of a new stadium in Benslimane with a capacity of 115,000. The overall cost of bringing the 6 stadiums up to CAF and FIFA standards, and of building the future stadium of the Greater Casablanca, amounts to MAD 20 billion (USD 2 billion).

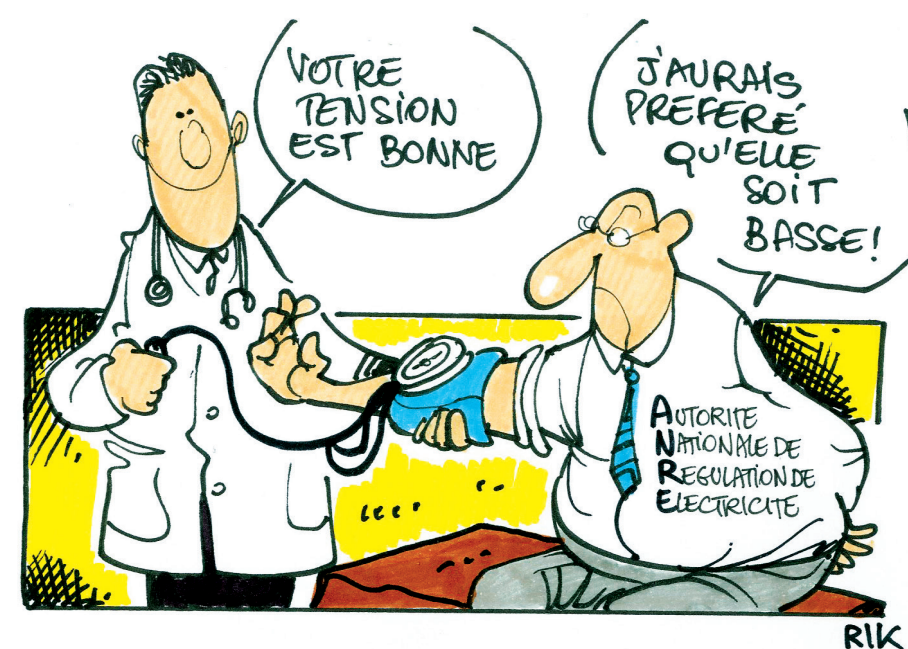
For the Tangiers stadium, the work mainly involves removing the athletics track, installing a roof over the stadium and building two underground car parks around the stadium. In addition, there are two training pitches, which must be located less than 20 minutes from the stadium where the competitions are played, in accordance with FIFA standards. The project also involves the Rabat sports complex. This involves the construction of a

fully covered football stadium with a capacity of 68,403 seats, spread over 6 levels, with two hospitality levels. The stadiums in Fez, Casablanca, Marrakech, and Agadir will be refurbished both inside and out, and the stands, changing rooms, and toilets will be refurbished. Technical equipment will also be upgraded, including lighting, electrical facilities, and access control. In any case, the Finance Bill provides for a program to upgrade football sports infrastructure to the tune of 300 million dirhams (USD 30 million) and the creation of local football pitches in the prefectures and provinces of the Rabat-Salé-Kénitra region to the tune of 70 million dirhams (USD 7 million). The same goes for the creation of 80 local basketball, volleyball, skating, and petanque pitches in the same region at a cost of 48 million dirhams (USD 5 million). Added to this is the creation and redevelopment of local pitches in the Casablanca-Settat region with 128.8 million dirhams (USD 13 million). Also on the agenda is the development of sports facilities in Souss-Massa and Guelmim, as well as the installation of sports infrastructure, in accordance with the provisions of the Skhirat-Témara development agreement. □

Mohamed CHAOUI

Electricity grids: Low voltage will have to wait

DEFENDERS of low voltage are finding it hard to make themselves heard. While some of them thought that the draft decree No. 2-24-740 (relating to the setting of technical prescriptions concerning the conditions of connection and access to medium-voltage electricity distribution grids and the rules concerning their use), currently being prepared by the Ministry of Energy Transition and Sustainable Development, was a good opportunity to include Low Voltage, Leïla Benali's Department has categorically rejected this proposal. The same is true of the National Electricity Regulatory Authority (ANRE), which is responsible for publishing the code for the national electricity transmission grid, even though it has put forward some solid arguments. The first of these concerns access to the grid. ANRE points out that «in the presentation note of the draft decree, in fact in its second paragraph, it is mentioned that private operators have access to the Very High Voltage, High Voltage and Medium Vol-



tage grids». Except that private operators also have access to the Low Voltage grid « within the framework of law No. 13.09 relating to renewable energies, as amended and supplemented, and of law No. 82-21 relating to self-generation of electricity «points out ANRE. Thus» the grid code to be introduced by draft decree No. 2-24-740 should also cover the

LV grid « reads the piece of legislation, Another argument, and not the least put forward by the National Electricity Regulatory Authority, is that « in order to guarantee transparency and fairness in connection to the LV distribution grid, the scope of Article 11 of Law 48-15 could be extended to include LV grid access requirements». Article

11 of Law 48-15 stipulates that « The national transmission system operator shall draw up a national transmission system code setting out, in a non-discriminatory manner, the technical requirements concerning the conditions for connection and access to the national transmission system, including interconnections, as well as the rules concerning the use of the said system».

In response to these arguments, the Ministry retorted that 'the opening up of the Low Voltage, under the two new laws No. 40-19 and No. 82-21, is dependent on the publication of the implementation decrees. As a result, the grid code, in its current version focusing on MV distribution grids, will make it possible to guarantee transparency and fairness in connection and access to MV grids, which have already been opened up to investors under the law on renewable energies'. In other words, it will be necessary to wait for the publication of the application texts of laws No. 40-19 and No. 82-21 for private access to the LV grid to be effective. □

Aziz DIOUF

Morocco-France

Position on the Sahara reinforced



In his speech to Parliament, Emmanuel Macron made a simple point about the evolution of France's position on the Sahara issue, which speaks volumes about the expected reactions: «this position is not hostile to anyone», said the French president

EMMANUEL Macron will not any time soon forget the intensity of his appearance before Parliament on Tuesday October 29, 2024 in Rabat. Particularly when all the members of parliament from both chambers stood up for a standing ovation.

It was the French President who triggered this emotional charge, when he addressed the question of the Moroccan Sahara in his speech. «For France, the present and future of this territory fall within the framework of Moroccan sovereignty»,

he stressed, adding that «*autonomy under Moroccan sovereignty is the framework within which this issue must be resolved. The 2007 autonomy plan is the only basis for achieving a just, lasting and negotiated political solution, in accordance with the resolutions of the United Nations Security Council. This is the position that France will implement to accompany Morocco in international fora*», said the French President.

In his speech to Parliament, Emmanuel Macron made a simple point

that speaks volumes about the expected reactions: «*this position is not hostile to anyone*». Even without naming it, Algeria will feel targeted. And yet, our eastern neighbor claims not to be a party to the Moroccan Sahara issue.

Except that every time a country expresses a position in favor of the autonomy plan, Algiers brings out its classic big guns: recall of its ambassador, retaliatory measures and questioning of bilateral agreements.

All chancelleries know this inaudible musical score. Algeria is already waging a disinformation campaign against France. But the masks have come off.

«*The French position opens a new page in the book that the two countries want to write, together, but also with all those who want to act within a framework of regional cooperation in the Mediterranean, with Morocco's neighboring countries and with the European Union*», says the President.

An opportunity to recall that «*operators and companies will accompany the development of these territories through investments, sustainable initiatives and solidarity for the benefit of local populations*». □

Mohamed CHAUI

Dialogue between two continents

BEYOND these two countries, the relationship between Morocco and France is also opening up towards Europe and Africa. He believes that dialogue between two continents can open up new paths beyond those of flight and exile. He quotes an extract from the royal speech when the Kingdom decided to return to the African Union: «*It is a beautiful day when one carries one's heart towards the beloved home, Africa is my continent and my home*». The Euro-African partnership needs to be strengthened. Everyone is aware that the African continent will be the one where a large part of our future will be played out. «*With Africa, because yesterday's lenses are outdated, we are committed to renewing our relationship with peoples and governments*», he said. He put it bluntly that: «*Morocco, by virtue of its geography, history, culture, and the vision of its rulers, has long affirmed its calling as a platform. Its stability, openness, and development are unrivalled assets that can inspire many joint initiatives*», said the President. □

Building a new partnership strategy

THE French President is not one to beat about the bush. He clearly stated that he wanted to draw inspiration from Morocco and its actions on the continent. «We need stability in this region that respects people, and development projects for young people. This will not only ensure stability, but also put an end to the trafficking and misery which, from the Gulf of Guinea to Libya, is causing suffering on both the African and European continents. In this region, France, with humility, is seeking to build a new partnership strategy with Africa to build a future together. Not just in the Sahel and Sahara, but throughout the continent, through education, agriculture, ecological projects, digital technology, and energy. In these areas, there are joint actions that we can build together. □

Weekly highlights

Right of generic substitution, a solution to drug shortage?

WHAT if the right of generic substitution were a solution to the recurring shortage of medicines? In any case, it's a demand regularly voiced by dispensing pharmacists, but which has still not been legally authorized due to traditionalist resistance. «Morocco regularly relies on an international benchmark made up of a number of neighboring countries to draw up its laws, in particular the decree on drug pricing. Why shouldn't it do the same for the introduction of the right to substitution?» asked Hasna Mamouni, newly elected president of the M Pharma pharmacists' association. She also stressed the advantages of this provision for all stakeholders, starting with the patient. In fact, every time a drug is out of stock, as is currently the case for many pharmaceutical products, the patient sometimes has to go to several pharmacies in search of his or her medication, whereas «there are several so-called generic drugs with an equivalent therapeutic effect, available in sufficient quantities and which pharmacists could serve if the right of substitution were in force. In addition to



Hasna Mamouni, new president of the M Pharma association

benefiting the patient, this would also be a win-win situation for the country as a whole, since it would avoid the expiry of medicines, not to mention the favorable financial impact for insurance companies», added the president of the pharmacists' association. The right of substitution would also improve the financial situation of many pharmacies. A difficult situation attributed by the

president to several factors: sometimes mediocre sales, fixed charges such as rent which increases on a regular basis, water, electricity, salaries... Added to this is the continuous price drop of several thousand drugs over the last few years, which has an impact on the income of professionals. «The violation of the monopoly on medical devices», which are marketed in all kinds of entities, is

not without consequences for pharmacists' cash flow. These include sterile compresses, syringes, intranules (short polypropylene intravenous catheters), and other products.

It should be remembered that, for many patients, a pharmacist remains the first port of call before consulting the doctor. It should be noted that a decree was recently published in the Official Gazette allowing pharmacists to carry out rapid diagnostic tests such as blood glucose, strep A, influenza, as well as pregnancy and ovulation tests.

It should be remembered that, for many patients, the pharmacist remains the first port of call before consulting the doctor. It should be noted that a decree was recently published in the Official Gazette, allowing pharmacists to carry out rapid diagnostic tests such as blood sugar, type A strep throat, influenza, pregnancy and ovulation tests. Pharmacists are calling for the possibility of dispensing other procedures, such as vaccination against influenza, which is particularly deadly among the chronically ill. □

Hassan ELARIF

Strike bill raises social tensions

THE draft organic law governing the right to strike, first submitted to the House of Representatives in September 2016, seems, once again, to be at the heart of tensions. Although adjourned on October 23, it is once again on the agenda for Thursday October 31, when it is due to be examined by the Social Sectors Committee. This raises a number of questions: will this deadline also be postponed, or will the discussion finally be able to open in a concrete manner, marking a significant step forward in a delicate dossier that polarizes the Government and the trade unions?

In any case, the Union Marocaine du Travail (UMT) trade union is firmly opposed to programming the text in its current form, and is calling for it to be withdrawn until a consensus can be reached. This rejection is echoed by certain political parties, which had already demanded the postponement of the October 23 meeting.

What's more, a number of unions have joined forces to form a united



«We deplore the hasty approach of the Ministry of Employment, which put this text on the agenda without even waiting for the end of consultations with the unions», Miloudi Moukharek, General Secretary of the UMT, told L'Economiste

front against the bill. For the UMT, this piece of legislation is a direct threat to the right to strike, which remains a constitutional right and has been acquired through long union and social struggles. «We denounce the hasty approach of the Ministry of Employment, which has put this piece

of legislation on the agenda without even waiting for the end of consultations with the unions», Miloudi Moukharek, General Secretary of the UMT, told L'Economiste. In his view, this haste represents a departure from previous agreements, which stipulate that all draft legislation with a social

impact must be submitted to the trade unions before being presented to Parliament.

The journey of the piece of legislation through the House of Representatives testifies to long-standing opposition. After more than 5 years of stalemate, the text was reinstated as part of the social agreement of April 30, 2022, with the terms of discussion set out in the agreement of April 29, 2024. However, consultations failed to iron out the profound differences between the government and the unions.

Discussions had intensified since July, and there was every reason to believe that progress had been made. But the differences remain. «On essential points, we are still in major disagreement. The philosophy of the draft remains unchanged from the previous version: notice periods remain long, custodial sentences are maintained, and other sanctions remain», said Miloudi Moukharek, pointing out that these punitive measures are unacceptable. □

Khadija MASMOUDI