



SENEGAL RESEARCH NOTE

A Squandered Opportunity

Macky Sall's televised address on Monday night was his first since nationwide protests erupted on March 3rd in reaction to his transparent attempt to use the weaponized justice system to eliminate a political rival from contention in the 2024 elections. But it is **doubtful how much this attempt will have done to repair the self-inflicted political damage**¹.

- 1 In fact, the President had **almost nothing to say about the elephant in the room**: the proximate cause of last week's violent confrontations. What he offered instead was a call for peace², while urging that the transparently political case at the root of the conflagration be allowed to run its 'independent' course³. This strongly suggest that he has no intention of calling off the judicial offensive against the PASTEF leader, **a decision that all but guarantees further a further cycle of protests and repression**.
- 2 To his credit, **the President managed to steer clear of the absolute howlers** with which a succession of his ministerial surrogates had insulted listeners' intelligence over the preceding days⁴. And he did announce that the families of the 10 individuals killed during the protests would receive (unspecified) damages and that the Government would assist with medical treatment⁵ for the injured⁶.
- 3 It was also interesting to hear the President **belatedly expressing empathy with Senegal's young people**⁷ over the pervasive nightmare of unemployment and underemployment⁸ - a crisis so acute that it has inspired the **desperate rallying cry "Barça ou Barzakh"**⁹. Under the circumstances, it was natural that Mr. Sall should remind his audience of the CFA 1,000 billion – equivalent to approximately 7% of GDP - that the Government disbursed on Covid relief last year.
- 4 However, he went completely over-board in the next sentence, when he asserted that **his administration had even extended financial support to members of Senegalese diaspora**, to the tune of CFA 12 billion. Milking the *reported* initiative for all it was worth, he emphasized that,

"Ce soutien à la diaspora illustre d'ailleurs l'étendue de la crise que nous vivons ; parce que d'habitude, c'est bien la diaspora qui vient en aide au pays, et non l'inverse."

¹ The President's wooden delivery compared most unfavourably with the rhetorical *tour de force* that Ousmane Sonko - then freshly released after five days in detention - had delivered first in Wolof and then in French before thousands of supporters gathered at Place de l'Obélisque (Dakar), earlier that evening.

² I.e. *"J'invite au calme et à la sérénité."*

³ *"Sur l'aspect judiciaire de cette crise, laissons la justice suivre son cours en toute indépendance."*

⁴ For example, in an astonishingly bellicose statement last Friday, interior minister Antoine Felix Diome accused the protesters of **"terrorisme"** and **"grand banditisme"**. Not to be outdone, foreign minister Aïssata Sall Tall chimed - on [France 24](#), no less - with the preposterous allegation that, behind the riots lurked foreign hands, notably from **"des pays qui jalouent le Sénégal et son modèle de développement"**. But the prize for pure farce must go to justice minister, Malick Sall who managed to maintain a straight face while suggesting assuring an interviewer from [France 24](#) that the protesters were professional wrestlers frustrated by the protracted lockdown: **"Ça fait un an qu'il n'y a plus de combat de lutte, c'est pourquoi ils sont sortis pour manifester"**(!)

⁵ The Red Cross has just reported that its volunteers provided first-aid to a total of 590 persons injured in protests across the country, 232 of whom needed to be transferred to a hospital.

⁶ As it happens, these were both demands that Sonko had made in his own address, 90 minutes earlier.

⁷ Hitherto, the Sall administration has adopted an attitude of studied indifference vis-à-vis this acute social problem that Ousmane Sonko's PASTEF party has made a centre-piece of its political message.

⁸ Thus far the much-vaunted Plan Sénégal Émergent has done nothing to address this scourge.

⁹ I.e. *"Barcelona or the Hereafter"* – a defiant slogan that proclaims a willingness to brave the treacherous Atlantic crossing to the Canary Is in order to reach the perceived El Dorado of the European Union.

Unfortunately, this statement is completely at variance with the Staff Appraisal in Senegal's 2d PCI Review, which noted with satisfaction that:

*"Despite the crisis, workers' remittances increased by 4.2 percent during the first nine months of 2020..."*¹⁰

In soccer terms, Macky Sall would be regarded as having scored **an own goal, with his team already behind.**

¹⁰ See IMF Country Report 21/18, published Jan. 13, 2021.

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