

**SENEGAL RESEARCH NOTE [REV]****The Halo Continues to Slip**

We have previously argued that *neither Macky Sall nor Senegal's eurobonds deserve the halo they share*<sup>1</sup>. The kafkaesque legal proceedings now underway against the leader of PASTEF, the main Opposition party are a case in point.

- ① Given the parliamentary arithmetic<sup>2</sup>, it was a foregone conclusion that Friday's plenary session of the National Assembly would vote to revoke the immunity enjoyed by Opposition leader Ousmane Sonko. This démarche is clearly the **prelude to a trumped-up criminal case intended to sideline the politician whom Macky Sall regards as his principal rival**<sup>3</sup> ... well ahead of the 2024 elections<sup>4</sup>.
- ② The offensive against Sonko was actually launched in January when the **Interior minister threatened to dissolve the PASTEF party** over a purported violation of the campaign-finance laws. However, Antoine Felix Diome was forced to retract the absurd claim when it was established that **his total misconstruction of the relevant legislation would have ensnared the ruling party itself(!)**<sup>5</sup>
- ③ Now that the PASTEF leader has been stripped of his parliamentary immunity, **we can expect him to be summoned within days to answer an even more preposterous charge** than the imaginary campaign-finance offence. This time he is accused - by an employee of the spa where he has been receiving massage-therapy to relieve upper-back discomfort - of multiple acts of sexual assault committed in the said spa, at gun-point.
- ④ Not only did the investigation by the Gendarmerie fail to turn up any corroborating evidence, but both the spa proprietor and a second employee who were on the premises at the time of the alleged assault have provided **testimony that directly contradicts the account provided by the claimant**<sup>6</sup>. These forensic lacunae probably explain the extraordinary procedural anomalies that followed, most notably:

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<sup>1</sup> See our research note "[Senegal - Priced for Perfection](#)", Jun. 12, 2020.

<sup>2</sup> Benno Bokk Yaakar, the ruling coalition (built around Macky Sall's Alliance Pour la République party) controls 125 of the 165 seats.

<sup>3</sup> It is worth recalling that as early as his first term, the President spelled out his principal political goal: "*Réduire l'Opposition à sa plus simple expression*". In practice this has meant a relentless campaign to sideline his rivals by by wielding one of two implements: a weaponized justice system or political co-optation. The most egregious examples of the former were Karim Wade (presumptive candidate of the Parti Democratique du Sénégal founded by his father, President Abdoulaye Wade) and Khalifa Sall, the immensely popular mayor of Dakar. In successive proceedings of doubtful integrity, each was found guilty of financial improprieties, imprisoned and thus rendered ineligible to challenge Sall in the 2019 election.

Then, last November Sall 'sidelined' Idrissa Seck (who had led his party Rewmi to a second-place finish in the last election), by enticing him into joining the ruling coalition. For this apostasy Seck was rewarded with the chairmanship of the Conseil économique, social et pour l'environnement (CESE), the Republic's most senior position (after the Presidency and the Speakership of the National Assembly).

<sup>4</sup> By then the incumbent will have completed his second presidential term, making him constitutionally ineligible to run. However, there are strong indications that he intends to follow the recent example of his Ivorian counterpart and circumvent the term-limit.

<sup>5</sup> The preposterous allegation related to the proceeds raised during PASTEF's fund-raising tour of the Senegalese diaspora earlier that month. However, within hours social media had erupted with clips of President Sall himself boasting – after his electoral triumph in 20212 - about the amount of financial support his own party had received from Senegal's expatriate community [[Video](#)].

<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile it has emerged that the accuser is related to an official of the ruling APR party and was moreover picked up from the scene of the alleged crime by "a black SUV", having told her colleagues that she was hoping to catch a 'Djakarta' (the local term for the humble tuk-tuk vehicle). Nor had she made any mention of the alleged assault as she casually departed the premises that evening. She has since been sequestered 'under police protection' – presumably to concoct a less implausible account.

- the Prosecutor-General<sup>7</sup> abruptly **transferring the relevant dossier from the Gendarmerie to a hand-picked investigating magistrate** (*judge d'instruction*);
- the **failure to name Sonko in the formal complaint**<sup>8</sup> on whose basis he has been stripped of his parliamentary immunity and will no doubt be charged.

⑤ There is little doubt that **the case against the PASTEF leader will be aggressively pursued - despite its grave infirmities**. Given the Sall administration's proven ability to secure a 'guilty' verdict from even the most unconvincing set of facts, there is **every likelihood of Sonko finding himself in the same boat as Karim Wade and Khalifa Sall** – ineligible to run for office by reason of conviction on a criminal charge.

⑥ However, **such an outcome might well prove a hollow triumph**. Because of the PASTEF leader's tremendous popularity among the country's increasingly disaffected youth<sup>9</sup>, **many in this cohort might become radicalized** were he to be sidelined so arbitrarily.

As will be recalled it is less than two weeks since four Senegalese nationals, arrested in the vicinity of the Malian border, were charged with being recruiters for the AQIM-affiliated Groupe de soutien à l'Islande et aux Musulmans<sup>10</sup>. Macky Sall would do well to consider **the law of unintended consequences**.

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<sup>7</sup> A committed loyalist of Macky Sall, Sérigne Bassirou Guèye had played a key role in securing the conviction of Khalifa Sall (the former mayor of Dakar) and then in burying the investigation into the Petro-Timis scandal in which the President's own brother was deeply implicated.

<sup>8</sup> Instead, the complaint is labelled "*Plainte contre X*", a formulation habitually employed when there is no evidence implicating a particular suspect.

<sup>9</sup> This is because Sonko is the only mainstream politician to have championed the cause of Senegal's vast cohort of under-employed young persons who continue to feature disproportionately among the legions of undocumented migrants attempting to reach the perceived El Dorado of the European Union.

<sup>10</sup> Only 10 days earlier a [UN Security Council report](#) had warned that, "*JNIM (the Arabic initials of the GSIM) elements, backed by radical Islamist influencers, encroached into Senegal along the road from Kayes to Kaffrine, in Bakel, in the Ferlo reserve and in the gold extraction area of Saraya.*"

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