

Weekly highlights by L'ECONOMISTE

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On-line mode activated



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Only 6% of companies dare to lodge a complaint



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400 billion dirhams of investment expected by 2030



Al-Mansour Ed-Dahbi, the hidden face of a sultan



EDITORIAL

Beyond the rating

Meriem OUDGHIRI

FINGERS crossed, like all self-respecting superstitious people: Morocco continues on its good trajectory. Standard & Poor's has just raised the country's rating outlook from « stable » to « positive ». The rating agency's assessment of the progress of reforms is very encouraging. In a context marked by booming exports, major investment projects, measures taken to combat water stress, AFCON 2025, World Cup 2030, rising growth forecasts for the coming years, S&P could raise its rating again in the next 12 and 18 months.

This is good news, as it enables the country to maintain its label of reliability for its international relations. Partners, whatever the level and nature of their relations with a Moroccan player, know that they can commit themselves with confidence. Of course, one can make fun of ratings and of their agencies, which

ultimately only put into their system what they are given to put in. Beyond the rating itself, it is the comments that are the most interesting.

In fact, more than economic barometers, these organizations attach particular importance to the political messages of the countries in which they operate, including when it comes to promises of reform.

To stay on the world map, it is essential to ensure that the machine is not damaged and that efforts are not made in vain. Morocco has an opportunity: investment has not left the table. We need to maintain it and bring in more. Similarly, a great deal of work remains to be done on the business climate and social safety nets. These are the mechanisms that make up the fundamentals of development or make or break a country's reputation and attractiveness, and boost or undermine confidence. □

Weekly highlights

Corruption

Only 6% of companies dare to lodge a complaint

HERE is every reason to hope that 2024 will mark a major turning point, propelling us into a new era of preventing and combating corruption. The phenomenon of corruption would be part of a strong and lasting downward trend, enabling our country to set itself up as a model on the international scene « , says Mohamed Bachir Rachdi, President of the National Authority for Probity, Prevention, and the Fight against Corruption (INPPLC), who clearly sets out his ambitions in this area in Issue 5 of the Probity Letter he has just published. This coincided with the publication of several international indicators, including Transparency International's Corruption Perceptions Index (CPI), the benchmark barometer in this field. An analysis of Morocco's CPI results reveals a number of important points. In 2023, the country's rating stagnated, slipping 3 places in the global ranking. Its score remains below the world average. The country ranks in the middle of the table in the MENA



68% of companies surveyed believe that corruption is widespread or very widespread in the country, compared with 8% who take the opposite view, according to the survey conducted by the Instance de probité

region, occupying the 10th place out of 18 countries, with no notable change from the previous year. On a continental level, it ranks 17th out of 53 African countries, losing two positions compared to 2022.

Bachir Rachdi's institution conducted a national survey to measure the extent of the scourge of corruption in Morocco.

The sample is made up of 6,000 resident citizens, Moroccan residents living abroad, and businesses. To be precise, this second edition of the survey targeted around 1,100 companies between May 2 and August 3, 2023. The aim is to identify the sources of corruption with which companies are grappling, with a view to developing

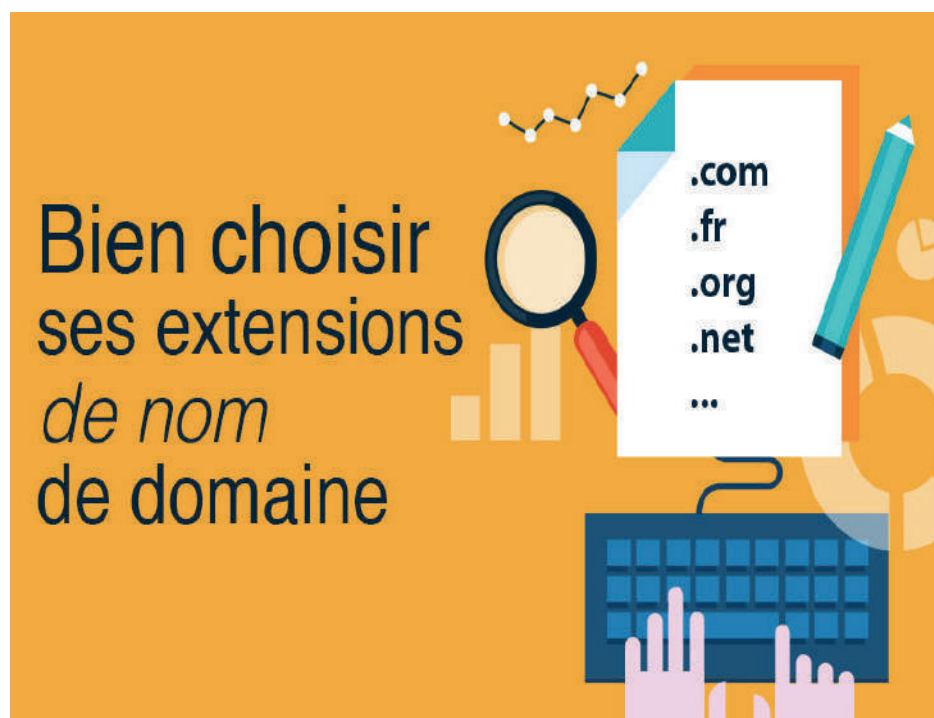
and strengthening policies and mechanisms to deal effectively with such sources.

The results of this survey confirmed the persistence not only of a negative perception of the phenomenon, but also of a high level of exposure to acts of corruption. Specifically, 68% of companies surveyed believe that corruption is widespread or very widespread in the country, compared with 8% who take the opposite view. 23% of companies say they have been exposed to some form of corruption over the past 12 months. However, these businesses do not call out these practices even if they are entitled to the service in question. In fact, only 6% of companies exposed to corruption have filed a complaint, and less than 3% have denounced an act of corruption they witnessed. According to the companies surveyed, three areas are most affected by corruption: firstly, licenses, approvals, and authorizations. Secondly, public procurement and contracts. □

Mohamed CHAUI

The dot.ma extension locked

THE National Telecommunications Regulatory Agency (ANRT) has announced a new decision concerning the administrative, technical, and commercial management of Internet domain names. The decision will soon be published in the Official Gazette. «The aim is to respond to changes in the domain name management ecosystem, both nationally and internationally. The text makes improvements to certain processes for managing domain names (NDD) under «.ma», drawing inspiration in particular from global best practices in this field», explains the ANRT. According to Khalid Ziani, telecoms & IT expert, «this decision clarifies the conditions for declaring «-ma» domain names, which are the responsibility of the ANRT, and thus enshrines Moroccan sovereignty». Furthermore, said the expert, «the other provisions make it possible to guarantee compliance with Moroccan sovereignty for the creation of these domain names (location of the service provider or administrator, DNS servers in Morocco), which was not



the case previously «. This decision also confers «an arbitration role on the ANRT without any possibility of challenge».

The ANRT has not described any appeal or challenge procedure. Concerning this precise point, the expert points out, there could be legal problems and unnecessary recourse to

the courts. It should be noted that the ANRT's decision is explained by its status as administrator of the domains which are the subject of this decision with ICANN (Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers).

This American private-sector organization is responsible for coordinating and managing the allocation of

domain names at international level. In Morocco, ANRT is responsible for representing Internet address holders before international governmental and non-governmental bodies in charge of the international management of Internet domain names. According to the telecommunications regulatory agency, the purpose of this decision is to set out the administrative, technical, and commercial management procedures for Internet domain names, which are the responsibility of the ANRT.

The domain names covered by this decision concern the following extensions and/or zones: «.ma». A domain name extension, also known as a «top-level domain» (or «TLD»), refers to the last part of the Internet address of a website. For example, «.ma». The domain name extension also plays a crucial role in the structure of internal addresses. It is also essential for the proper functioning of the DNS (Domain Name System). The Domain Name System is an organized, hierarchical database that maps domain names to IP addresses. □

Amin RBOUB

Creating of businesses

On-line mode activated

RYAD Mezzour can breathe a sigh of relief. The Minister of Industry and Commerce has succeeded in getting the draft decree he has been waiting several years for adopted by the most recent Government Council meeting. This is the piece of legislation that sets out the terms and procedures for creating and supporting businesses electronically, bearing in mind that the law was approved in 2017. It has to be said that the draft decree, examined for the first time by a Government Council meeting last September, had not come to fruition. Further consultations were needed with the stakeholders concerned. This has now been done. For its sponsors, this piece of legislation is part of the reinforcement of the legislative and regulatory framework aimed at improving the investment climate and increasing the competitiveness of national companies. The bill also implements law no. 88.17, which calls for the adoption of electronic procedures and formalities for



setting up and supporting businesses, through a dedicated electronic platform managed by the Moroccan Industrial and Commercial Property Office (OM-PIC) on behalf of the Government.

The public authorities have opted for a gradual approach to the launch of this system. This is in line with joint decisions by the Minister of Justice, the Secretary General of the Government, the Minister of Economy and Finance,

and the Minister of Industry and Trade. The latter will determine the list of courts involved in setting up companies and carrying out subsequent restrictions electronically. With a view to its gradual implementation, the second paragraph of Article 21 also states that a subsequent decree will be issued to determine the date on which subsequent procedures will begin. This is the case for completing the subsequent restric-

tions by the authorized representative for companies set up electronically. The same operations will be carried out, but this time for companies created non-electronically.

In order to achieve these goals, the decree approves a set of procedures and technical measures that reflect the nature and specific nature of electronic work, such as the adoption of the principle of exchanging documents and data between the departments and bodies concerned, which means that the people concerned do not have to submit those documents and data to other administrations. This involves filling in a single form, which is equivalent to a request addressed to all the services and bodies involved in the procedure for setting up a business or making changes to its legal status. In this context, it is important to bear in mind the legal responsibility of the applicant regarding the validity of the data and documents provided via the electronic platform. □

M.C.

Batteries for electric cars

400 billion dirhams of investment expected by 2030

CHINESE firms are beginning to invest in Morocco's lithium battery value chain. As announced (see our edition of Monday, April 1), BTR New Material Group is leading the way with a project to build a production unit for cathodes, an essential component of electric vehicle batteries, at an investment cost of 3 billion dirhams, which will eventually create 2,500 jobs. The plant is due to come on stream in 2026.

In the meantime, one should not be surprised to see other Chinese companies arriving in droves this year to invest in the Kingdom's electric car battery value chain.

«We are working to build up a portfolio of 400 billion Dirhams (USD 40 billion) exclusively in the battery value chain by 2030», announced Ryad Mezzour, Minister of Industry and Commerce, at the Mobility Forum held in Rabat at the beginning of March. This means that, by this deadline, some 132 investors with the same commitment size as BTR New Material Group will be needed to reach the target set by



The Ministry is counting on two major assets for Morocco to prevail. One is that the Kingdom has a very good competitive position in lithium batteries. At a time when the price per KWh is currently averaging 110 to 115 US dollars, factories in Morocco can produce lithium batteries at a unit price of 70 US dollars

the Department of Industry.

Will this be possible? In any case, the Department is counting on two major assets that Morocco can bring to bear. One of these, and by no means the least, is that the Kingdom has a very good competitive position in lithium batteries. Indeed, at a time when the price per KWh is currently averaging between US\$110 and US\$115, facto-

ries in Morocco can produce lithium batteries at a unit price of US\$70. This represents a price difference of 36%, and a significant competitive advantage that Morocco can offer the world. « This attractiveness alone is enough to attract investors. In fact, it is the main reason why investors in general, and Chinese firms in particular, are lining up to open a lithium battery manufactu-

ring plant in Morocco », say the sources at the Ministry. The other key argument is that Morocco is a producer of both internal combustion and electric cars, a market which is set to expand rapidly in terms of volume in the very near future. And Morocco has the potential to export more than its competitors. □

Aziz DIOUF

Weekly highlights

Al-Mansour Ed-Dahbi, the hidden face of a sultan

THE SA revelation! Al-Mansour Ed-Dahbi was already talking about «patrimonialization» in the 16th century, reports architect, urban planner and geographer Soad Belkeziz. She is the co-author with her father, linguist Mohamed Ben Abdeljalil, of a fine book on the «Palaces and fortresses of Al-Mansour Ed-Dahbi» (see L'Economiste 6713, February 28, 2024). «What this book tells us marks a departure from what Moroccans know about this sultan», comments Fouad Ben Seddik. Dr. Ben Seddik, who holds a doctorate in political science and is a member of the Economic, Social, and Environmental Council, spoke at a book signing in Casablanca (see L'Economiste no. 6713, February 28, 2024).

The great Saâdian sultan - who reigned from 1578 to 1603 - was well aware of the value of heritage. Including that bequeathed by previous dynasties such as the Almohads. «Was El Mansour the precursor of the Castle of Versailles? Did he inspire Louis XIV?», wonders architect and member of the Casamémoire association, Houda Manjra.

«I want to build tomorrow's heritage. Import and use new techniques while adapting them to our Empire», said the builder of the Palais El-Badi. «The Sultan traded sugar for gold. So he had the means to import marble from Italy in particular. All the façades of the Palais El Badi' were coated in gold. This is confirmed by the extremely detailed Portuguese plan of 1585», said the members of the Belkeziz family.

The authors also refer to the manuscript of the vizier of the pen, Abdelaziz El Fashtali, spokesman for the sultan «who created a Magrebian style with capitals».

This interest in heritage seems to be a little-known fact about the sultan's personality. History - at least what we were taught at school - focused largely on the power of his reign and his material wealth, hence his name Al-Mansour Ed-Dahbi. Literally, the golden victor.

The vizier had described his sultan as «endowed with divine, supernatural creativity...». He was a man of the world with a passion for knowledge. For every era, its own propaganda? «Architecture is a law-maker», says



3D image of the gold-coated entrance to the Kouba Al Khamsinia. Verses are traced in black marble on white marble, on the pediment of the monument

Soad Belkeziz, referring to the sultan and «self-proclaimed Commander of the Faithful».

For archaeologist and historian Abdellah Fili, «the El Fashtali manuscript is there to glorify and sublimate Al Mansour Ed-Dahbi. It is an eminently political document». Whether or not we agree with this point of view, the case of the Saâdian sultan is not unique: «These are models that existed in the past. We also find it in Philip II, who asserted his power through architecture», said Soad Belkeziz. In the 16th century, this Spanish king built the monastery-palace of Escorial in Madrid.

«Propaganda is a beautiful thing... It made me believe, as it did so many others, that Morocco was the home of urban planning, that everything was regulated and organized...», said urban planner and architect Michel Ecochard in his essay «Casablanca, le roman d'une ville». In 1946, the authorities of the French protectorate



Built in Marrakech in the 16th century, the Palais El Badi' featured a mythical tower. However, historians such as Gaston Deverdun have doubted its existence



To find out more, the beautiful book «Palais et fortresses d'Al-Mansour Ed-Dahbi» by Soad and Mohamed Ben Abdeljalil Belkeziz, published by ID Territoires, price 500 Dirhams

called on Ecochard to head the urban planning control department in Rabat.

Propaganda is part of the political game and part of human history. Did the author of «Manahil Es-Safa» have a choice?

El Fashtali wrote about disciplines other than architecture. Faced with the scarcity of historical sources and the loss of archives, his manuscript has the merit of existing and bearing witness to hydraulic techniques, sociology... His reader learned that the tower of the Palais El-Badi' was slightly lower than the minaret of the Koutoubia in Marrakech. This was «out of respect by the sultan for his predecessors» of the Almohad dynasty. Many historians, however, have doubted the existence of this tower. It overlooked the palace and was adorned with silver fountains. Their abundant waters were made to dance by a gigantic Ferris wheel elevator. This description is by Abdelaziz El Fashtali. □

Façal FAQUIHI

Did you know?

SULTAN Ahmed El Mansour Ed-Dahbi lived for 17 years in the Ottoman Empire, now Turkey. What effect did this stay have on his creativity? «Sultan Ahmed El Mansour Ed-Dahbi was greatly inspired by military architecture. And contrary to popular belief, there are similar structures in Marrakech, capital of the Saadian dynasty from 1554 to 1636. «The Ottoman influence is reflected in the El Badi Palace», explains architect Soad Belkeziz. This is the first time that such a high dome has been built, alluding to the Qoubba Khamssinia (Dome of Fifty Cubits), built with 1,400 tree trunks carried on 700 camel loads. The very large dome required the use of reinforcing steel for the framework. A rather original consolidation technique for the time... Abdelaziz Fechtali (vizier of the feather) speaks of 100 quintals of iron. □