

AFRICA RISK CONSULTING

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President Abdelmadjid Tebboune (2019-present), speaking at Labour Day celebrations on 1 May, reaffirms his government's commitment to improving the living standards of Algerians and supporting their purchasing power in accordance with the country's financial situation. Algeria's parliament approves a new media law on 13 April that tightens control over the work of local journalists and imposes new media restrictions. The French-headquartered Reporters Without Borders (RWB) publishes its 2023 World Press Freedom Index, on 2 May ranking Algeria as 136th out of 180 countries for press freedoms. Tebboune calls into question the creditability of the RWB reports, noting that its rankings are subject to the whims of its directors who do not take into consideration the realities on the ground. A commission of Algerian and French historians established to work on French colonisation and the war of independence in Algeria meets for the first in Algiers on 19 April.

Tebboune affirms efforts to improve living standards...

President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** (2019-present) reaffirmed his government's commitment to improving the living standards of Algerians and supporting their purchasing power in accordance with the country's financial situation.¹ In his address delivered during Labour Day celebrations on 1 May, Tebboune said that the government will continue these efforts while ensuring decent living conditions by promoting social dialogue and legalising trade union work as a means to preserve workers' rights and safeguarding their future.² Tebboune noted:

"The gains made in the labour world confirm our determination to preserve the citizens' dignity, value their effort, and rely on work as an essential value for building a modern and strong economy."

Tebboune also emphasised that human capital is the focus of sustainable development and building national wealth. He explained that since 2020, his administration has included improving the well-being of workers at the core of its priorities by abolishing taxes on individuals with limited income, raising the minimum wage, and increasing wages, grants and pensions.³

These government initiatives are notable but they have not been sufficient in easing the economic pressures facing Algerians with annual inflation standing at 9.3%.⁴ The recently concluded period of Ramadan was widely described domestically as one of the most expensive in the country's history due to sharp rises in the prices of many basic foodstuffs.⁵ The rise in

¹ Middle East Monitor, 2 May 2023

² Middle East Monitor, 2 May 2023

³ Middle East Monitor, 2 May 2023

⁴ Africa News, 12 Apr 2023

⁵ Africa News, 12 Apr 2023

local food prices is mainly due to the impact of **Covid-19**, economic disruptions from the **Russia-Ukraine** conflict and the historic drought facing the **North African** region.⁶

Authorities have put in place some policies aimed at bringing prices down to sustainable levels in the long term. Since October, Algeria has joined **Egypt** and the **United Arab Emirates (UAE)** in enforcing food price ceilings.⁷ Authorities have also loosened import restrictions on some products to ease domestic bottlenecks and tame inflation while publishing new regulations to facilitate import operations. The **World Bank** in April estimated that growth in Algeria will drop to 2% in 2023 from 3.1% in 2022.⁸ However, **Europe's** plans to diversify its energy supply from Russia could support investment in Algeria's hydrocarbon sector, which could help medium-term growth. However, it may take some time before the average Algerian can feel relief from the enacted policies. Tebboune's promise to promote social dialogue and legalise trade union work should also be taken sceptically, given that the Algerian government is notorious for withholding rights (see below).

Parliament approves law tightening media control...

Parliament approved a new media law on 13 April that tightens control over the work of local journalists and imposes new media restrictions.⁹ The upper chamber of parliament, **Conseil de la Nation** (council of the nation), began debating the new law on 10 April. The law is aimed at further restricting press freedom by tightening media ownership regulations and preventing journalists from protecting sources. The lower chamber, **Assemblée Populaire Nationale (APN)** (people's national assembly), which is controlled by parties within the ruling **Le Front de Libération Nationale (FLN)** (national liberation front) coalition, on 28 March approved the bill on its first hearing allowing it to be passed to the upper chamber.

The law bans local media publications from receiving funding or "*direct and indirect material aid*" from abroad or risk facing criminal prosecution that includes fines of approximately \$15,000.¹⁰ Even though the bill states that "*professional secrecy is a right*", it requires journalists to divulge their sources if a judge orders so.¹¹ The law also bans dual nationals from owning all or part of media outlets.¹² Journalists working for any foreign media outlets without accreditation will also be fined almost \$7,600.¹³ However, unlike the previous legislation that required the authorisation of the communications ministry to establish a newspaper, the new law has simplified the process by allowing journalists to create a media outlet by only making a statement.¹⁴

When the legislation passed into law, the government was quick to stress that it is key to ensuring the free exercise of media activity under legal controls. Communications minister **Mohamed Bouslimani** said on 13 April that the new law seeks to "*enshrine freedom and pluralism of the press*" and "*protect it from all forms of deviation*".¹⁵ **Khaled Drareni**, the North African representative of **French-headquartered Reporters Without Borders (RWB)** said on

⁶ Africa News, 12 Apr 2023

⁷ World Bank, Apr 2023

⁸ World Bank, Apr 2023

⁹ Aljazeera, 14 April 2023

¹⁰ First Post, 11 Apr 2023; Reuters, 13 Apr 2023

¹¹ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

¹² Zawya, 11 Apr 2023; Reuters, 13 Apr 2023

¹³ First Post, 11 Apr 2023

¹⁴ Reuters, 13 Apr 2023

¹⁵ Reuters, 13 Apr 2023

13 April said that while some chapters of the law are positive, some are considered a violation of press freedom.¹⁶

Drareni was particularly referring to the sections on revealing sources to the judiciary and the restriction of access to any funding.¹⁷ Last month, RWB, the **United States (US)**-headquartered rights group **Amnesty International** and journalists' rights groups including the US-based **Committee to Protect Journalists (CPJ)** denounced the decision by a court in Algiers on 2 April to sentence prominent journalist **Ihsane El Kadi** to three years in prison for "*foreign financing of his business*".¹⁸ El Kadi, who is a vocal critic of the government was arrested on 24 December and is one of the last remaining independent media owners in the country.¹⁹

... as Algeria Ranks 136th in Press Freedom Index...

RWB published its **2023 World Press Freedom Index** on 2 May, ranking Algeria as 136th out of 180 countries for press freedoms, dropping two places from 134th in 2021.²⁰ Tebboune, in a meeting with Drareni on 3 May, called into question the creditability of the organisation's reports published on press freedom in Algeria, noting that its rankings are subject to the whims of its directors who do not take into consideration the realities on the ground.²¹ The organisation highlighted that its ranking was made taking into consideration that the press in Algeria is restricted with various red tape, including independent media outlets being regularly subjected to pressure, journalists prosecuted or imprisoned and blocking measures being applied on many websites.²²

RWB's report also highlighted that Algeria's legislative framework increasingly restricts journalistic work. While Article 54 of the constitution guarantees press freedom, RWB criticised it for imposing on journalists respect for the country's "*constants and its religious, moral and cultural values*".²³ RWB also called into question the penal code, amended in 2020, to stipulate that anyone who "*deliberately publishes or promotes, by any means, false and malicious news or information*" could be jailed for one to three years.²⁴ The group argued that the code is often used to prosecute journalists on grounds of undermining public security and order, leading to widespread censorship.²⁵

Tebboune informed Drareni that RWB's insistence on the perception that Algeria is not a place of press freedoms is slander against the country and injustice to its people.²⁶ He also emphasised that the only worthwhile rankings are those the **United Nations (UN)** and its institution publish. In a statement after the meeting, Drareni confirmed that his meeting with Tebboune lasted for only five minutes, and that he asked the president to release journalist El-Kadi.²⁷

Tebboune's reaction to the ranking and the subsequent meeting creates the impression that the president does not take the matter seriously. This could be because Algeria does not seem to be facing any serious repercussions for its poor human rights and press freedoms record, due to its

¹⁶ Reporters Without Borders, 13 Apr 2023

¹⁷ Reporters Without Borders, 13 Apr 2023

¹⁸ Al Jazeera, 2 Apr 2023

¹⁹ Zawya, 11 Apr 2023

²⁰ Reporters Without Borders, 2 May 2023

²¹ Middle East Monitor, 6 May 2023

²² Middle East Monitor, 6 May 2023

²³ Reporters Without Borders, 2 May 2023

²⁴ Reporters Without Borders, 2 May 2023

²⁵ Middle East Monitor, 6 May 2023

²⁶ Middle East Monitor, 6 May 2023

²⁷ Al-Quds Al-Arabi, 2 May 2023

key position in helping **Europe** meet its energy needs as it weans itself off Russian energy. Algeria is also a key security partner of the US in the region. A local source told **Africa Risk Consulting Briefing (ARC Briefing)** that the situation in the country is “grim”:

“The judicial system is being used to silence journalists. Unfortunately, this is the trend in the region and in Middle East’s most authoritarian countries, like Egypt and Saudi Arabia.”²⁸

Inaugural meeting of French-Algerian historians on colonisation takes place...

A commission of Algerian and **French** historians established to work on French colonisation and the war of independence in Algeria met for the first in **Algiers** on 19 April.²⁹ The announcement of the inaugural meeting was made in a press release from the **Elysée Palace** in **Paris** which also noted that the committee is tasked with “*working on the history of contemporary Algeria, to better understand each other and reconcile the wounded memories*”.³⁰

Tebboune and French President **Emmanuel Macron** (2017-present) announced the creation of the ten-member (five from each country) commission in August in Algiers.³¹ The independent commission will primarily investigate the origins of French colonisation in Algeria from the 19th to the 20th century and compile an inventory of the archives deposited in both countries.³² This will cover the period of French colonial rule from 1830-1962 in order to keep them far from “*political exploitation*”.³³ The commission will also pay close attention to the sequence of war and the decolonisation process.

The press release from the Elysée also revealed the composition of the body on the French side.³⁴ The five French historians on the committee are:

French Historians	Occupation
Benjamin Stora	Co-president of the commission
Florence Hudowitz	Curator at Museum of Civilizations of Europe and the Mediterranean (MUCEM)
Jacques Frémeaux	University history professor
Jean-Jacques Jordi	University lecturer
Tramor Quemeneur	University lecturer ³⁵

The Algerian commission members are not known yet. Speaking on the committee, Tebboune said on 7 May that he hopes discussions with France on the colonial era file will achieve progress, adding that he is determined to put the history and memory file to be created in a “*transparent, righteous, and objective*” manner without any “*bargaining or concessions*”.³⁶

The formation of the commission is a positive step in ensuring smoother relations between Algeria and Paris which had been at odds with each other for several months. Algeria and **France** announced on 24 March that their governments had agreed to end their diplomatic rift

²⁸ ARC Source, Local Resident

²⁹ Africa News, 20 Apr 2023

³⁰ Africa News, 20 Apr 2023

³¹ Middle East Monitor, 2 May 2023

³² Africa News, 20 Apr 2023

³³ Middle East Monitor, 8 May 2023

³⁴ Elysée palace, 19 Apr 2023

³⁵ Elysée palace, 19 Apr 2023

³⁶ Middle East Monitor, 8 May 2023

and “reinforce mutual cooperation”, following a phone conversation between presidents Tebboune and Macron they discussed a “number of issues of common interest” (See *ARC Briefing Algeria Apr 2023*).³⁷ The French presidency also announced that the two presidents agreed to reinforce communication as a strategy to “avoid facing misunderstandings”.³⁸ Tebboune also informed Macron that Algiers’ ambassador to Paris would soon return to the French capital.

The latest diplomatic crisis began when Algeria recalled **Said Moussi**, the country’s ambassador to **France**, on 8 February for consultations with immediate effect after accusing France of orchestrating the escape of **Amira Bouraoui**, a rights activist Algeria wanted to arrest (*ARC Briefing Algeria Feb 2023*).³⁹ Algeria recalled Moussi after Bouraoui allegedly crossed into **Tunisia** illegally after evading Algerian judicial surveillance, where she was arrested upon her arrival on 7 February and faced an extradition hearing, however, a Tunisian court ordered her to be freed and she was subsequently permitted to leave the country on 8 February.⁴⁰ Bouraoui’s release and flight to Paris were reportedly due to French diplomatic pressure on Tunisia.⁴¹ Bouraoui’s escape from Tunisia was one of the issues discussed by Tebboune and Macron on 24 March.

With that diplomatic rift behind them, it is hoped that the commission will improve bilateral relations. However, a major point of contention is that while Algeria is adamant about receiving an apology for colonial crimes, Paris argues that the time is right to turn the page and look toward the future.⁴² Tebboune is particularly adamant about France apologising however, Macron’s insistence on not doing so is highly likely to lead to more friction in the relationship.

Planner

May 2023 **Moscow (Russia)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Moscow;
 May 2023 **Paris (France)** President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to visit Paris;

Chronology

9 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Alarabiya news*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** and foreign minister **Ahmed Atta** host **Saudi Arabia**’s foreign minister Prince **Faisal bin Farhan** to discuss ways to strengthen bilateral relations and enhance cooperation in various fields;

8 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Agricensus*. State grain importer, **Office Algerien Interprofessional des Cereales (OAIC)**, issues a tender and invites offers for a nominal 50,000 million tonnes of optional origin milling wheat for shipment during the 1-15 July and 16-31 July periods;

7 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmajid Tebboune** says that he hopes the talks with **France** on the colonial-era files (1830/1962) will achieve progress without any “bargaining or concessions”;

³⁷ Algeria Press Service, 25 Mar 2023

³⁸ Middle East Monitor, 25 Mar, 2023

³⁹ Bloomberg, 11 Jun 2022

⁴⁰ News24, 9 Feb 2023

⁴¹ News24, 9 Feb 2023

⁴² Middle East Monitor, 25 Mar 2023

7 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. The **African Union** and other international bodies note Algeria's significant efforts to promote Arab unification and strengthen Palestinian unity as well as its role in the resolution of conflicts in **Africa**;

5 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *North Africa Post*. Authorities are reportedly gearing towards a massive expulsion of thousands of **sub-Saharan** migrants settled in the suburbs of Algiers, purportedly because they propagate tuberculosis;

4 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *BNN Breaking*. Algeria announces its support for any agreements that would lead to holding parliamentary and presidential elections in **Libya**;

2 May 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Health minister **Abdelhak Saihi** chairs an emergency meeting of the **Arab Health Ministers Council** on the serious health and humanitarian situation arising from the escalation of violence in **Sudan**;

30 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algerian Parliament*. Parliament announces the resignation of its deputy speaker, **Mondher Boudin**, from the presidency of the **Advisory Group for Combating Terrorism** in the **Inter-Parliamentary Union** in protest at **Israel's** membership of the group;

28 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. **Turkey's** ambassador to **Morocco**, **Omer Faruk Dogan**, an outspoken supporter of Morocco's territorial integrity and sovereignty over **Western Sahara**, is recalled to Turkey, with converging reports suggesting that the decision comes due to pressure from Algeria;

25 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Anadolu News Agency*. A court rejects a request to release former minister delegate in charge of micro-enterprise, **Nassim Diafat**, who is the first minister under President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** to be imprisoned in a corruption case;

24 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Morocco World News*. **Spanish** foreign affairs minister **Jose Manuel Albares** accuses Algeria of interfering in Spain's domestic affairs., stressing that bilateral relations should be based on mutual respect and "*non-interference*";

23 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. **Autorité de Régulation de la Poste et des Communications électroniques (ARPCE)** (post and electronic communications regulatory authority) says the number of mobile phone subscribers reached 49 million on 31 December 2022 in Algeria, up by 4.26% to 47 million in the same period in 2021;

20 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Middle East Monitor*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** pardons 8,985 prisoners in the run-up to **Eid El-Fitr**, granting an amnesty to those who are serving or have suspended sentences of 12 months or less;

19 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** discusses bilateral cooperation with **Turkey's** President **Recep Tayyip Erdogan**;

19 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. Interior and national planning minister **Brahim Merad** says the state is working to raise Algiers to the rank of a great global capital through modernising its structures and improving its inhabitants' living conditions;

18 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. President **Abdelmadjid Tebboune** sends messages to the **United Nations Secretary General**, the current chairman of the **African Union** and the **Executive Secretary of the Intergovernmental Authority on Development** as part of a common and unified approach to stop the fighting in **Sudan**;

13 Apr 2023 **Algiers (Algeria)** *Algeria Press Service*. **United Nations Security Council** members unanimously commend Algeria's role in spearheading international mediation efforts between non-state armed groups in **Mali**;

About Africa Risk Consulting:

Africa Risk Consulting (ARC) is a pan-African consulting company that provides timely, relevant information and advice that enables its clients to take informed investment decisions and to safeguard their reputations.

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