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President Alassane Dramane Ouattara (2011-present) receives Moroccan King Mohammed VI for a two-week visit, signing 14 memoranda of understanding (MoUs). Government forces detain Nouvelle Alliance de Côte d'Ivoire pour la Patrie (NACIP) party president, Mohamed Sam Jichi, for making allegedly xenophobic remarks. The Abidjan metro project, following a meeting between France-based Bouygues Construction S.A. and vice president Daniel Kablan Duncan, reportedly may face delays.

Mohammed VI makes a two-week visit

Moroccan monarch **King Mohammed VI** (1999-present), on 14 March, ended a two-week visit to **Côte d'Ivoire**.¹ This was the fourth time Mohammed VI has visited president **Alassane Dramane Ouattara** (2011-present) since he assumed power.² During this time, Moroccan investment into Côte d'Ivoire has tripled.³ Morocco in 2015 was the single largest source of foreign direct investment (FDI) in Côte d'Ivoire – 22% of the total, a disproportionately high level of investment, as this figure dropped to 6% in 2016.⁴ The value of deals already signed in 2017 appears to indicate that this figure will rapidly recover. During the king's visit, Moroccan and Ivorian officials signed 14 memoranda of understanding (MoUs), including agreements in technology, defence and transport – sectors in which Morocco has invested relatively little in Côte d'Ivoire to date.⁵

France, Côte d'Ivoire's former colonial ruler, remains the single largest investor in gross terms over the last decade, but its influence in politics appears to be fading.⁶ Ouattara's relationship with current French president **François Hollande** (2012-present) is less cordial than that between Ouattara and former French president **Nicolas Sarkozy** (2007-2012), whom Ouattara knew before his accession to power and refers to as a "friend".⁷ Two days after Mohammed VI left **Abidjan**, Ouattara flew to **Paris** to meet Hollande, sharing his visit with newly appointed **Gambian** president **Adama Barrow** (2017-present).⁸

Morocco's investments are concentrated in economically strategic sectors of the Ivorian economy. As much of Moroccan investment is directly connected to the royal **Société Nationale d'Investissement (SNI)** holding company, maintaining a good relationship with Mohammed VI is a priority for Ouattara, in order to hold onto Morocco's economic commitment. Morocco has interests in various Côte d'Ivoire (and some also across the region) ventures in:

- Telecommunications, through Côte d'Ivoire's third largest network provider **Moov Côte d'Ivoire S.A.**, subsidiary of partially state-owned **Maroc Telecom S.A.**;
- Banking, through **Atlantic Business International Ltd** subsidiary **Banque Atlantique**, subsidiary of the Morocco-based (partially SNI-owned) **Banque Centrale Populaire (BCP)** group; through **Société Ivoirienne de Banque (SIB)**, subsidiary of SNI-owned **Attijariwafa**

¹ Koaci, 14 Mar 2017.

² RFI, 24 Feb 2017.

³ RFI, 24 Feb 2017.

⁴ Jeune Afrique, 8 Jan 2016.

⁵ Le 360, 27 Feb 2017.

⁶ www.cepici.ci

⁷ Multiple sources: Huffington Post, 12 Apr 2011; www.ivoirebusiness.net

⁸ RFI, 16 Mar 2017.

Bank S.A.; and **Bank of Africa Group** subsidiary **Bank of Africa – Côte d’Ivoire S.A.**, subsidiary of Morocco-based (partially SNI-owned) **BMCE Bank**, Côte d’Ivoire’s 2nd, 6th and 7th largest commercial banks respectively;⁹

- Infrastructure, through the \$450m (initially \$166m-\$322m) **Cocody Bay** rehabilitation programme, which Moroccan state-owned **Marchica Med S.A.** will build and the SIB partially funds;
- Real estate, through **Alliances Côte d’Ivoire S.A.**, subsidiary of Morocco-based **Groupe Alliances S.A.**, providing close to 10,000 houses over 65 hectares in **Anyama** (Abidjan).

As one local business owner states,

“Morocco is everywhere. It’s no wonder that [Mohammed VI] stays so long. Frankly, I have no doubt that Moroccan businesses are bypassing public tendering processes with the closeness of this relationship. It makes it difficult for us to compete fairly, when they are getting so much backing from Ouattara.”¹⁰

Following the two-week visit, Moroccan companies provided the Ivorian economy with a significant influx of funds: Moov on 24 March renewed its mobile licence for another 15 years, disbursing FCFA 23.7 billion (\$40.6m), while the BCP on 21 March provided FCFA 66.7 billion (\$109m) to help finance infrastructure projects in 2017.¹¹

The presence of Morocco in Côte d’Ivoire is significant not only for economic reasons. Since Morocco’s readmission to the **African Union (AU)** in February (see *ARC Briefing Morocco February 2017*), the country is seeking to flex its diplomatic muscles in the region. Morocco therefore represents an important ally for Ouattara. Furthermore, as Morocco in February announced that it wishes to join the **Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)**,¹² Mohammed VI could potentially become the second largest economic power in the regional grouping, after **Nigeria**. Ouattara appears to recognise the strategic importance of a strong alliance with Mohammed VI for strengthening his own position as a West African superpower, in relative terms, both economically and politically.

Security forces detain minor opposition leader ‘Sam the African’

Security forces on 17 March detained minor opposition **Nouvelle Alliance de Côte d’Ivoire pour la Patrie (NACIP)** party president, **Mohamed Sam Jichi** (known as ‘**Sam the African**’, due to his **Lebanese** background).¹³ Authorities detained Jichi due to allegedly xenophobic remarks that referred to Ouattara. Jichi is currently detained in the **Maison d’Arrêt et Correction d’Abidjan (MACA)** (Abidjan detention and correction facility).¹⁴ In a video released on the internet on 11 March, Jichi said,

*“If I am Lebanese, then Alassane [Ouattara] is **Burkinabe**. Alassane and I have the same status: he is Ivorian, I am Ivorian. He has an Ivorian party; I have an Ivorian party. But, in his case, his wife isn’t Ivorian. Me, at least, my wife is Ivorian.”¹⁵*

Jichi’s lawyer, **Modeste Abie**, said that the government had detained Jichi for “*inciting tribal hate, xenophobia and military revolt*”.¹⁶ Jichi represented the opposition **Front Populaire Ivoirien (FPI)** party in the December legislative elections, but lost his seat in the **Yopougon** neighbourhood of Abidjan to the ruling **Rassemblement des Houphouëtistes pour la Démocratie et la Paix (RHDP)**

⁹ www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr

¹⁰ Source, business owner, Abidjan

¹¹ Multiple sources: *Le 360*, 24 Mar 2017; *L’Observateur*, 21 Mar 2017

¹² *MAP*, 25 Feb 2017.

¹³ *Jeune Afrique*, 20 Mar 2017.

¹⁴ *Jeune Afrique*, 20 Mar 2017.

¹⁵ *Jeune Afrique*, 20 Mar 2017.

¹⁶ *Jeune Afrique*, 20 Mar 2017.

candidate.¹⁷ According to one local political commentator, his detention constitutes political persecution and an encroachment on freedom of speech,

“What happened to Sam the African is shocking – this is a violation of freedom of speech. And they’re keeping him at the MACA as well, where conditions are awful. Sam clearly wasn’t inciting any sort of violence, rather reminding us that Ouattara is just as much of an immigrant as anybody else. Just because he’s white and Lebanese doesn’t mean he is any less Ivorian – I think that was the point. Anyway, before Ouattara returned to run for the presidency, he spent most of his time outside Côte d’Ivoire.”¹⁸

The nationality of Ouattara is historically a contentious issue, as the *ivoirité* provision in the constitution introduced under former president **Henri Konan Bédié** (1993-1999) and enforced during former president **Laurent Gbagbo**’s (2000-2011) rule meant that Ouattara was legally unable to run for the presidency, due to his alleged **Burkina Faso** identity. The sensitivity of the issue, and Jichi’s connection to Gbagbo, has led to accusations of political persecution.

The Lebanese community condemned Jichi’s statements. Vice president of the **Communauté Libanaise de Côte d’Ivoire** (Ivorian Lebanese community) **Attié Yéya Nayef** said,

“The Lebanese community firmly condemns Sam Jichi’s (Sam the African) statements, with our last energy... We would like, in the name of Lebanese community, to express our total support for [Ouattara] and his government.”¹⁹

The **Tribunal de Première Instance du Plateau** (Plateau court of first instance) will hear Jichi’s case concerning the allegations on 31 March.²⁰

It appears that there are several elements that contribute to the government’s reaction. Jichi’s statement does not seem to constitute xenophobic incitation, making the detention appear arbitrary. However, when considering the historic context and political affiliations, it appears that there is much implicit in Jichi’s statements, which, in the eyes of government, justifies his detention as legitimate.

Abidjan Metro reportedly to experience further delays

The planned construction of the 1.3 billion euro (€) (\$1.41 billion) metro line in the capital Abidjan, may experience further delays, following a meeting between France-based **Bouygues Construction S.A.**, management, and vice president **Daniel Kablan Duncan**.²¹ After a meeting in late February between Kablan and Bouygues CEO **Olivier Bouygues**, Kablan reportedly challenged a clause that stated the Ivorian government would have to compensate the operators in the event that metro usage fall below an unspecified threshold.²² On previous occasions, commentators had raised the comparatively high cost of the line when compared to similar projects in **Addis Ababa (Ethiopia)**, **Dakar (Senegal)** and **Johannesburg (South Africa)**, which ranged from \$400-750m.²³ Kablan is reportedly seeking to lower the total cost of the project.²⁴

Bouygues Construction (33% stake) signed the 40-year concession in July 2015 with France-based **Kéolis SA** (25%), and **South Korea**-based **Dongsan Engineering Co Ltd** (9%) and **Hyundai Rotem Co** (33%).²⁵ When initially signed, the consortium scheduled for construction to take no longer than five and a half years, which would enable launch of the metro in October 2020.²⁶ The metro line plans

¹⁷ www.cei-ci.org

¹⁸ Source, journalist, Abidjan.

¹⁹ Source, journalist, Abidjan.

²⁰ Jeune Afrique, 20 Mar 2017.

²¹ La Tribune Afrique, 19 Mar 2017.

²² La Tribune Afrique, 19 Mar 2017.

²³ Jeune Afrique, 30 Aug 2016.

²⁴ La Tribune Afrique, 19 Mar 2017.

²⁵ APA, 7 Jul 2015.

²⁶ APA, 7 Jul 2015

to repurpose and redevelop existing rail infrastructure to build a 37.5 kilometre line from the northern neighbourhood of **Anyama** to the airport on the southern side of the city in **Port-Bouët**.²⁷ Abidjan continues suffer from significant traffic congestion, which impedes fluid economic activity in the city. Efficient and affordable public transport, avoiding the use of existing road infrastructure, appears the best long-term solution to address this.

However, the project experienced several delays in the lead-up to the signature of this contract, after the government issued the initial tender in 2013.²⁸ France-based rail transport conglomerate **Alstom S.A.** and engineering company **Systra S.A.** both pulled out of the consortium in 2014, due to financing concerns, which they claimed went against company ethics.²⁹ It is unclear why the source of funding – largely through debt financing – caused both companies to exit the project. On 20 March, Ouattara announced that he would like the French government to give the Ivorian government a concessional loan in order to buttress finances for the metro project.³⁰

The pulling out of major members of the consortium raises doubts about the conditions of the deal. It appears that the current dispute between the Ivorian government and Bouygues may cause delays to the October 2020 completion date. The economic and social benefits of the metro's launch in Abidjan would be significant.

²⁷ APA, 7 Jul 2015.

²⁸ APA, 7 Jul 2015.

²⁹ Jeune Afrique, 30 Aug 2016.

³⁰ APA, 20 Mar 2017.

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