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Senegal

Senegal: Debt fuels authoritarian drift

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Senegal has entered a zone of strong turbulence. Audits of the west African country's economic situation show that the figures published by the former government led by Macky Sall were false.

Accounting manipulations

In 2023, the official amount of debt was estimated at $17 billion. In reality, at least $7 billion has been hidden, placing Senegal among the most indebted countries on the continent.

Most of this hidden debt comes from loans to parastatals, which are registered as commercial loans. These structures, benefiting from the state guarantee, have financed major infrastructure works whose relevance is questionable, in particular the development of a motorway network, the construction of a new international airport and the purchase of real estate for various ministries.

At the time, Macky Sall's policy was welcomed by the heads of financial institutions, including the IMF. Today, the latter is making a loan of 1.8 billion dollars conditional on the restructuring of the debt, which would place the country under tutelage by imposing on it the classic recipes of structural adjustment policies: the reduction of public services, privatizations and the elimination of subsidies.

Measures contrary to popular interests

This situation has caused a crisis within the government. President Diomaye Faye is said to be more conciliatory towards the IMF than his Prime Minister Ousmane Sonko, who rules out any debt restructuring and defends solutions that preserve national sovereignty.

However, some measures taken are anti-popular in nature: the introduction of a tax on mobile moneytransfers, which are widely used in Africa, and the reduction of energy subsidies. The authorities elected on the promise to meet social expectations are pursuing a policy in the opposite direction.

The mobilization of students, demanding the payment of their scholarships, testifies to this. The delay sometimes stretches over a year. The government's response has been very brutal: closure of university restaurants, the violent intervention of the police on campus, the beating of students, the death of Abdoulaye Ba, and the ransacking of the university community.

This repression also extends to journalists and opponents, accused of crimes of opinion. While the “Assises de la Justice” were held in June 2024, none of the proposals to strengthen democratic rights have been implemented. Worse still, a wave of homophobia is sweeping the country, fuelled by a bill sponsored by Sonko, providing for prison sentences ranging from five to ten years for “unnatural acts”.

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