

## Report from Paris by Christine Bierre

### New relations with Morocco

*Jacques Chirac's first state visit to the North African country bodes well for a proposed Mediterranean stability pact.*

It was not by mistake that French President Jacques Chirac's first state visit to Africa was a trip to Morocco. The tone of the President's speech there, his numerous reminders of the historical cooperation between the France of Gen. Charles de Gaulle and the Morocco of King Mohammed V, all indicated that France expects to make Morocco the keystone of a new policy in the Mediterranean.

Chirac underlined this several times during his presidential campaign: France must renew a Mediterranean policy worthy of the name. And, with Algeria torn apart every day by a bloody civil war, such a strategy necessarily would go through Morocco. This explains why "it is indeed under the heading of urgency that France will place its relations with Morocco."

The praise he heaped on the Islam of tolerance also indicates clearly the desire of the new President to bolster such tendencies in the Islamic world. He thus demonstrated his respect for "hundreds of millions of believers who live their faith in a spirit of tolerance, through a modern Islam and open to the world." He also specified that he was not confusing "Islam, the second religion of our country, with the twisted image and caricature it is given by adherents of integrist Islam."

Concretely, how will this new presidential strategy be translated, and what is France prepared to put forward to support a "grand design" in the region, given that the national coffers are empty and every effort is

being made to cut the budget deficit to conform to the criteria of the Maastricht Treaty? These criteria dictate harsh budget austerity for the members of the European Union.

For the first time, the idea of a "stability pact for the Mediterranean" is appearing, and should be brought up at the next Euro-Mediterranean conference in November in Barcelona, Spain. Chirac characterized it as "an historic exercise which will bring together the leaderships of the Mediterranean coast, so that they may define the membership of a huge partnership." France and Morocco are called upon, at this conference, to take "the initiative for proposing, when the time comes, a stability pact for the Mediterranean, destined to ease tensions and to construct our common future."

At the same time, France is undertaking to act as "the spokesman to the European Union and its current presidency [Spain] to restore Euro-Moroccan cooperation to the prominent place it deserves." France is thereby undertaking to help Morocco obtain the status of association it has been seeking with the European Union since 1984, and which is currently the subject of negotiations with Spain, which opposes it, because of legal issues related to the fishing industry.

Such big ideas were accompanied by a few financial acts: Alain Madelin, France's economics and finance minister, who also went on the trip, has announced the conclusion of four financial protocols for a total of 2.15

billion French francs, FF 1.65 billion of which are earmarked to fight the drought which has severely affected the 1994-95 growing season in Morocco, including the lowest wheat and barley harvests in 10 years. A second protocol of FF 500 million concerns credits to Morocco's national department for drinking water for an urban water supply network (FF 100 million), as well as acquisition by the Moroccan railways of a signal system (FF 60 million). Another protocol, of FF 50 million, will be devoted to emergency operations in rural areas to improve the drinking water supply.

President Chirac is thus going to double the public aid that France has allocated to Morocco over the last five years. Relations between the two had reached their low point under the regime of President François Mitterrand.

Still, the adhesion to the Maastricht Treaty, which he intends to maintain at all costs, will not allow France to conduct a great policy in the region. Whoever talks about a "grand design," is talking about economic cooperation, which necessarily occurs through the extension of large sums of public credit, long term and at low interest, devoted to launching vast infrastructure projects, and permitting the beneficiary countries to sustain an economic takeoff.

But, the Maastricht Treaty forbids central banks from extending credit for public investment—never mind the fact that assigning the highest priority to meeting the Maastricht convergence criteria, prevents generation of the surplus to finance great projects overseas.

Only the return to a Gaullist policy of public credit and a national bank entirely dedicated to the service of the state would allow the conditions to be created to realize a true Mediterranean stabilization pact.