

Legislative Elections. Morocco held legislative elections on September 27, 2002 through a single-round list voting system that put forward candidates on regional and national lists. In what was considered the country's first free and fair elections, voters elected 295 new representatives to the *majlis al-nuwâb* (Assembly of Representatives) for a five-year term at the regional level, with 30 additional seats reserved for female candidates elected at the national level. Among the 22 parties entering the new parliament, the five leading parties were: the Socialist Union of Popular Forces (social-democrat) with 50 seats, the Independence Party (national-democrat) with 48 seats, the Justice and Development Party (islamist) with 42 seats, the National Rally of Independents (conservative) with 41 seats, and the Popular Movement (conservative) with 27 seats.¹ In the context of the ongoing electoral campaign, the Minister of *awqâf* (Endowments) and Islamic Affairs announced on June 13, 2002 that it would be illegal for "Friday preachers to indulge in any partisan or electoral propaganda," adding that any infractions would be punished.² Following the elections, King Muhammad VI named acting Interior Minister Driss Jettou as Prime Minister on October 9, 2002, pursuant to Article 24 of the constitution, replacing Abderrahmane Youssoufi.

Electoral Law. On May 6, 2002, the Assembly of Representatives unanimously adopted a new electoral law that introduced a list voting system rather than a uninominal vote. On June 28, 2002, the *majlis ad-dustûri* (Constitutional Council) declared certain provisions of the electoral law unconstitutional and expressed reserves on further provisions, prompting the government to reexamine the law. The high court decision (i) objected to the provision that prohibited members of the *majlis al-mustashârin* (Assembly of Councilors) to run for elections in the Assembly of Representatives – noting that members of the upper chamber may run for a seat in the lower chamber, but, if elected, must choose between the two seats afterwards; (ii) objected to the provision that assimilated votes for a regional list as an implicit vote for the same national list – stipulating electors to vote with a single ballot paper for candidates on the regional list and national list; and (iii) expressed reserve with respect to the provision that candidacy is conditioned on belonging to a political party – indicating that candidates who do not belong to a political party indeed have the right to participate in the elections. On July 2, 2002, the Council of Ministers adopted two amendments meant to adapt the electoral law to the Constitutional Council ruling; the Assembly of Councilors adopted the revised law on July 25, 2002.³

Finance Law. The Assembly of Representatives approved the 2003 finance law on December 25, 2002 by a majority of 108 votes (with 43 votes against). The law sets the overall state budget for 2003 at DH 139.51 billion, including DH 19.52 billion for investment expenses, representing a 2.05% decrease from the previous year. The finance law envisions raising DH 12.5 billion from the privatization of eight industries, including the *Regie des Tabacs* (the tobacco company), which has gone to tender and is expected to raise U.S.\$ 800 in 2003.⁴

Press Code. On May 6, 2002, final approval was given to the new Press Code, despite criticisms from the Moroccan press union and international press associations regarding the coercive nature of the law. Although the new law reduces penalties and fines for offending journalists and creates easier procedures for launching a new publication, the law retains jail terms for defamation of the king and the royal family (punishable by three to five years in prison). In addition, Article 77 of the law permits the Ministry of the Interior to seize publications that are deemed to disturb the public order. Article 29 of the law also allows the government to ban Moroccan or foreign newspapers that are deemed to "undermine Islam, the monarchy, national territorial integrity or public order."⁵

¹ Le Monde, "Pousée islamist à l'occasion des élections législatives au Maroc", September 30, 2002. L'Express, "Opération élections propres", September 26, 2002.

² Agence France Presse, "Morocco bans 'partisan propaganda' in Mosques", June 13, 2002.

³ BBC Monitoring International Reports, "Morocco: Government adopts amended laws on elections", July 3, 2002.

⁴ MEED Quarterly Report, "Morocco: Upturn Greeted with Caution", December 18, 2002.

⁵ Agence France Presse, "Morocco Parliament approves controversial press code", May 6, 2002. Le Monde, "Une réforme maintient les peines de prison pour les délits de presse au Maroc", May 23, 2002.