



## FRANCE-JORDAN: A MODEL PARTNERSHIP GAINING MOMENTUM

### Report on the France-Jordan inter-parliamentary group trip

*8 to 14 February 2020*

At the invitation of the Jordanian Senate's Jordanian-French Friendship Committee, a France-Jordan Friendship Group delegation, led by Cyril Pellevat, President of the Friendship Group, and with Mr Hervé Maurey and Mr Frédéric Marchand, Vice-Presidents, and Mr François Bonhomme, member of the Group, travelled to Jordan from 8 to 14 February this year.



*The delegation in the Jordanian Senate chamber, with the French Ambassador to Jordan*

Among the main themes addressed during the mission, particular attention was paid to development aid and defence cooperation.

This visit was also intended to consolidate the already strong ties forged by the French Senate with the Jordanian Senate. The delegation had the pleasure of being welcomed and received for an audience by the President of the Jordanian Senate, Mr Faisal Al Fayez, in the presence of Mrs Haifa Najjar, Head of the Jordanian-French Friendship Committee and members of the Friendship Committee.

The delegation also held discussions with Mr Omar Razzaz, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, as well as with Mr Wissam Rabadi, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation, Mr Ayman Safadi, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Mr Mohammed Al-Ississ, Minister of Finance and Mr Tayseer Al Nuaimi, Minister of Education. It also took part in a morning working session at the Agence Française de Développement's Jordanian office in Amman.

The delegation then visited the Zaatari refugee camp not far from the Syrian border, as well as the French H5 military base (Forward Air Base in the Levant) and the Al Humaymah military training centre, two symbols of the successful cooperation between Jordan and France in the defence field.

### **I. In a region riven by crises, Jordan faces unprecedented challenges**

#### **A – A zone of stability at the heart of the Middle East**

Jordan is an indispensable pillar of stability in the Middle East but is today facing some colossal challenges, which are the consequences of conflicts over which it has little control: the Israeli-Palestinian conflict on its western border, the war in Syria to the north, the war in Iraq to the north-east.

In this regional environment marked by crises, Jordan has long been a safe haven for many refugees, whether they are from Palestine (2 million), Syria (approximately 655,000) or Iraq (60,000), according to census figures from the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR).

This situation represents a formidable challenge for a country which had a population of just under 10 million at the end of 2018.

**B – Significant economic and security challenges**

The presence of so many refugees is of course far from insignificant for the State budget and the country's economy: the total cost of the presence of the refugees is estimated by the Jordanian authorities to have amounted to some \$11 billion since 2011. It includes, among other things, the cost to the country's infrastructure, in particular in the education and health fields, as well as the employment situation (the unemployment rate exceeds 18%) and the real estate market. The influx of refugees also weighs heavily on the country's resources, with water supply currently being one of the main challenges facing the Hashemite Kingdom, as for most countries in the region.

On the security front, although relatively safe, the country is not immune to disturbances, terrorist acts in particular, and is constantly under threat of terrorist infiltration (from Syria especially) and attacks, the last of which occurred in November 2019 on the archaeological site of Jerash. This threat is fully taken into account by the Jordanian authorities, which are mobilised in a relentless effort to prevent the terrorist risk, in particular by hosting the global coalition to defeat ISIS (see below) in the country and by permanently securing its borders with the neighbouring countries.

**II. France continues to support Jordan through development aid for infrastructure and refugee support**

In this context, France continues to support Jordan to help it to cope with the challenge it faces with the necessary lasting presence of refugees on Jordanian soil.

**A – Supporting the development of Jordanian infrastructure**

The purpose of this support is, in particular, to enable the Kingdom to carry through several structural reforms. It is focused more specifically on boosting infrastructure, through the work of Agence Française de Développement (AFD), whose presence in the country has grown continually since 2006. In February 2019, a memorandum of understanding concerning the investment of €1 billion over four years (2019-2022) was signed by France and Jordan to cover AFD's activities in the country.

Along with many projects relating to water management and the development of renewable energies, AFD's main areas of intervention in the Kingdom, the Agency is also providing substantial financial backing (a \$166 million loan) and technical support for the construction of the first bus rapid transport network in Amman. This mammoth construction project, which the delegation was able to visit, should eventually cover an area of almost 100 km<sup>2</sup>.



*The delegation visiting the bus rapid transit construction site in Amman*

**B – Direct support for refugees in Jordan**

With its border with Syria, Jordan is naturally confronted head-on with the consequences of the Syrian conflict. In February 2020, Jordan thus had no fewer than 654,692 Syrian refugees on its territory, according to the UNHCR. Today the great majority (80%) of Syrian refugees live in Jordanian towns, mainly in the north of the country, while 20% are in refugee camps.



*The delegation visiting the UN Women Oasis at the Zaatari camp*

The Zaatari camp was set up in 2012 and now accommodates 80,000 Syrian refugees, making it the main Syrian refugee camp in Jordan, and one of the largest in the Middle East. As the delegation was able to see, although living conditions there are far from ideal, they remain relatively acceptable. The UNHCR and 45 NGOs present on the ground are able to provide all the refugees housed in

the camp with access to basic health and hygiene services. One example, which the delegation had the pleasure of visiting, is the Oasis, managed by UN Women and co-funded by France to the tune of €1.7 million since 2017.

All those met by the delegation emphasised the absolute necessity of supporting Jordan financially to cope with its refugees, a burden it is assuming in spite of the economic difficulties the country faces. In 2019, the international community (UN agencies and the main international donors) thus granted over \$600 million in humanitarian aid for Syrian refugees in Jordan. As for French humanitarian aid (separate from the European budget) for refugees in Jordan, it came to over €62 million between 2011 and 2018, to which must be added €1.2 billion of AFD funding since 2011, aimed at improving Jordan's resilience in the context of the Syrian crisis.

### III. Close strategic cooperation in the defence field to meet the region's security challenges

The quality of Franco-Jordanian cooperation in combating terrorism was consistently mentioned and acclaimed, both by the Jordanian Prime Minister and Minister of Defence and by the French and Jordanian military personnel met on the ground.

#### A – The Forward Air Base in the Levant, a symbol of Franco-Jordanian cooperation in the fight against terrorism

Cooperation between France and Jordan on defence matters is illustrated first and foremost by Operation Chammal, a military operation attempting to fight Islamic terrorism in the Levant, in particular in Syria and Iraq. The Forward Air Base (BAP) in the Levant which opened for this purpose in September 2014 in northern Jordan, currently has about 300 French military personnel, mainly from the air force.

On its visit to the base, the delegation was able to measure the determination and great professionalism of the military personnel on the base, as well as the operational quality of military cooperation between France and Jordan.



*The delegation attending a dog training session in explosives detection and suspect neutralisation - Photo: Ministry of the Armed Forces*

#### Operation Chammal in the Middle East

*Launched on 19 September 2014, Operation Chammal is the French component of Operation Inherent Resolve (OIR) within a coalition of 80 countries and organisations. In coordination with France's allies also present in the region, Operation Chammal is intended to provide military support to the local forces engaged in the fight against ISIS on their territory. It rests on two complementary pillars: on the one hand a "support" pillar to provide backup for the troops fighting ISIS on the ground and to strike ISIS's military capacity, and, on the other hand, a "training" pillar for the benefit of local security forces. Currently, almost 1,000 military personnel are deployed overall as part of Operation Chammal. It also includes about a hundred military personnel deployed in Baghdad, training and advising Iraqi general staff and units.*

#### B – The Al Humaymah military training centre

Franco-Jordanian cooperation is also being pursued in border security, an area identified as a priority by King Abdullah and on which French President Emmanuel Macron made commitments when they met for the first time in 2017.

In this regard, French participation in the creation in 2017 of a Jordanian Quick Response Force, the first unit to intervene in the event of an incident on the borders, constitutes a further illustration of the quality of bilateral military cooperation between Jordan and France. The French contribution to this brigade consisted, among other things, in providing support for the creation of a military instruction centre specialising in combat in rugged terrain, situated at Al Humaymah, in the south of the country.

## Conclusion

During the visit to this centre, the delegation was able to witness a demonstration on a mountain shooting range and see the remarkable level reached by the brigade's mountain company trained by French Major Denis Durand. The president of the delegation expressed his wish to see this particularly fruitful cooperation maintained in a new form, the delegation having been informed that it was due to come to an end in summer 2020.

This mission was therefore an opportunity to see at first hand the dynamic cooperation that exists between France and Jordan in many fields, those of defence and development aid, although essential for the Hashemite Kingdom, being only a modest part of that cooperation.

It was an opportunity to further reinforce the quality of the relations built up over several years between the French Senate and the Jordanian Senate, which can be expected to be consolidated and expanded in the years to come.

### Members of the delegation



**Mr Cyril PELLEVAT**

President of the Friendship Group  
Senator for Haute-Savoie  
(Les Républicains)



**Mr Frédéric MARCHAND**

Vice-President of the Friendship Group  
Senator for Nord  
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**Mr Hervé MAUREY**

Vice-President of the Friendship Group  
Senator for Eure  
(Centrist Union)



**Mr François BONHOMME**

Member of the Friendship Group  
Senator for Tarn-et-Garonne  
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**Composition of the Friendship Group:** [http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami\\_659.html](http://www.senat.fr/groupe-interparlementaire-amitie/ami_659.html)