The Afro-Atlantic Connectivity Backbone

and the Royal Initiative for the Opening-Up of the Sahel

By **Roger Bertozzi**, Chair of the MENA2050 IMEC Task Force

Morocco stands out as a global strategic hub due to its fourfold Afro-Euro-Atlantic and Middle Eastern dimension.

Two major Royal Initiatives, both highly structuring and transformational, are being implemented simultaneously: the gas pipeline connecting Nigeria and around ten African countries to Morocco and to European and international energy markets (*African-Atlantic Gas Pipeline* — or *Nigeria-Morocco pipeline*), and the initiative to open up landlocked Sahelian countries (*The International Initiative of His Majesty King Mohammed VI to facilitate access for Sahel countries to the Atlantic Ocean*).

The key word that characterises these high-value, strategic megaprojects is **connectivity**.

Indeed, they represent a networking and enhancement of the key combined drivers of prosperity in the era of sustainable and knowledge-based economies, amplified by Artificial Intelligence: fossil, solar, wind, hydrogen, and possibly "new nuclear" energy sources; electrification; transport and logistics; water; the flow of goods and services; technologies; cables; and the "information highways" – from telecommunications to data and the spread of AI. All of this is framed by an approach that prioritises resilience and climate justice, environmental responsibility and regeneration, and the mass creation of green and highly skilled jobs.

The very notion of "opening-up" cannot be conceived without this multidimensional connectivity, as territorial opening-up is meant to foster sustainable socio-economic development based on the key factors outlined above.

That is why connectivity – whether rail, maritime, air, energy-related, or digital – is so central to other major projects for regional economic integration and interregional cooperation with a geo-economic and geo-strategic dimension: *Belt & Road*, initiated by China, with over USD 1 trillion in investment and a dedicated bank with many shareholder countries including European states like France; *Build Back Better*, launched by the USA and the G7, with pledges exceeding USD 600 billion; and the EU's *Global Gateway*, planning EUR 300 billion in investments,

potentially rising to EUR 600 billion, of which EUR 150 billion is earmarked for Africa under the new Africa-EU partnership.

We would therefore suggest to systematically use the terms **connectivity** and **opening-up** together whenever referring to the Sahelian initiative, but also the Nigeria-Morocco-Europe energy corridor.

The connectivity dimension is essential to give full meaning to the concept of opening-up and to highlight its vast potential.

In the same spirit of enhancement, we propose going beyond the traditional presentation of Morocco as a mere pivot between Africa and Europe.

We believe Morocco should now be presented as a **global strategic hub and partner**, owing to its unique and combined characteristics:

- An Afro-European and Arab, Mediterranean and Atlantic geography
- A major industrial and port hub from Tangier to Dakhla
- A strengthened African and Middle Eastern geopolitical actor, supported by its involvement in the Abraham Accords, bilateral strategic agreements, and its capacity for cooperation across the international stage
- A pole of stability and security – including energy security thanks to these initiatives – especially while the Eastern Mediterranean energy hub (*East-Med Gas*, in particular) remains exposed to instability and geopolitical risk
- A key role in the "Afro-Atlantic backbone" through the planned phases of the Nigeria–West Africa–Morocco–Europe–international markets energy connection, offering immense synergies with the Royal Initiative for opening up the Sahel
- Major South–North and South–South cooperation prospects, including – just across the ocean – with Latin America (Morocco has achieved major successes in both anglophone and francophone Africa; Africa includes Lusophone countries with special ties to Portugal and Brazil; Morocco and Spain enjoy close relations; and there is strong diplomatic, economic, and cultural potential to develop in South America through Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking triangulations)

In truth, the West Africa–Atlantic and Sahel projects should be presented and promoted in synergy.

This new Afro-Atlantic connectivity backbone, stemming from the Royal Initiatives, positions Morocco not only as an Afro-Euro-Atlantic pivot country, but as a **major global player**, bridging Mediterranean and Atlantic ports and enabling energy and digital connectivity – in terms of international trade, economic diplomacy, energy and climate diplomacy, co-development, and soft power.

Of major strategic interest for Africa, the MENA region, Europe, transatlantic and international partners, the Moroccan Initiatives must be viewed and supported in parallel with the IMEC (India-Middle East-Europe Corridor).

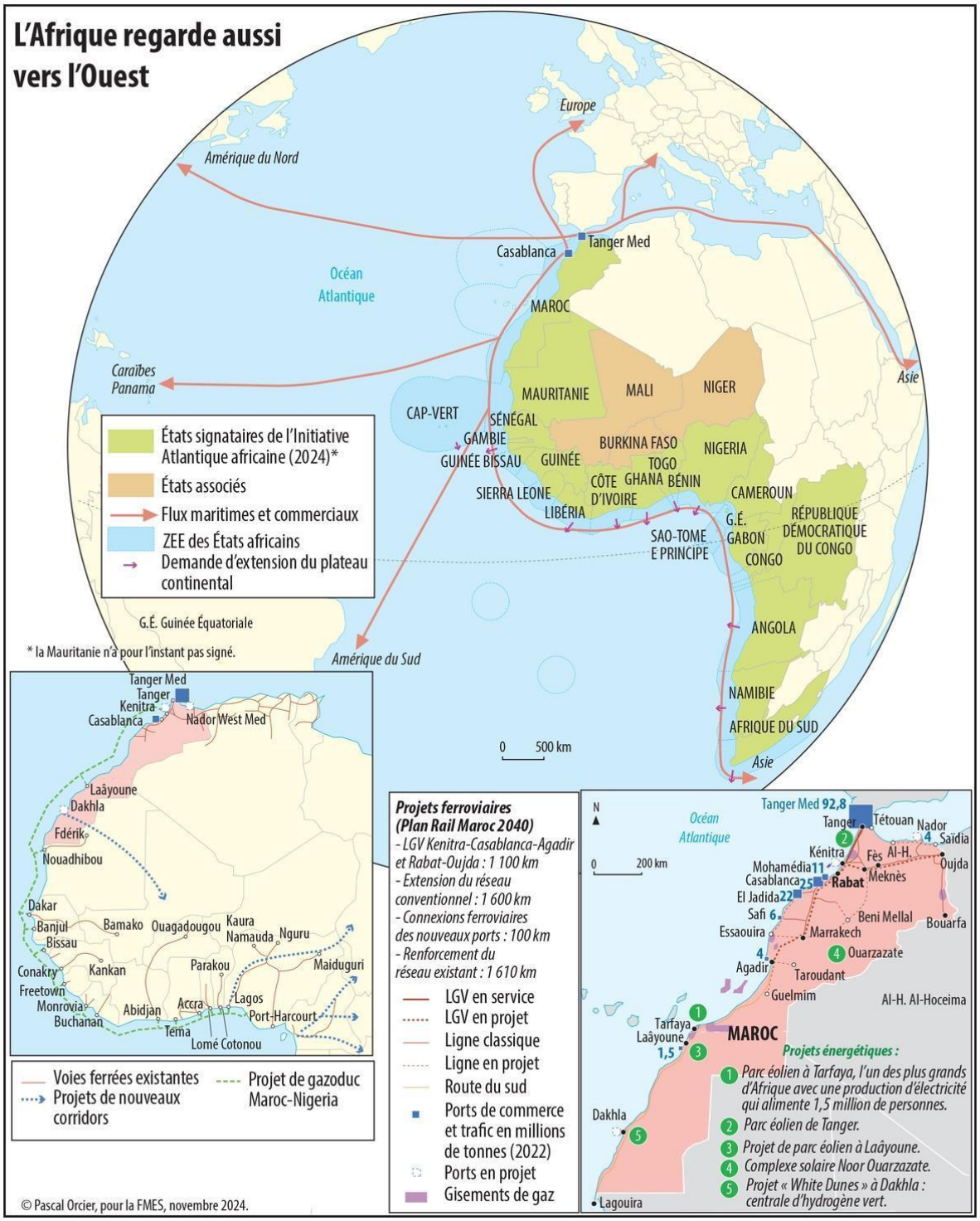
The Morocco-lead Atlantic Backbone and the IMEC will redefine the future of Africa, the Middle-East, Europe and India.

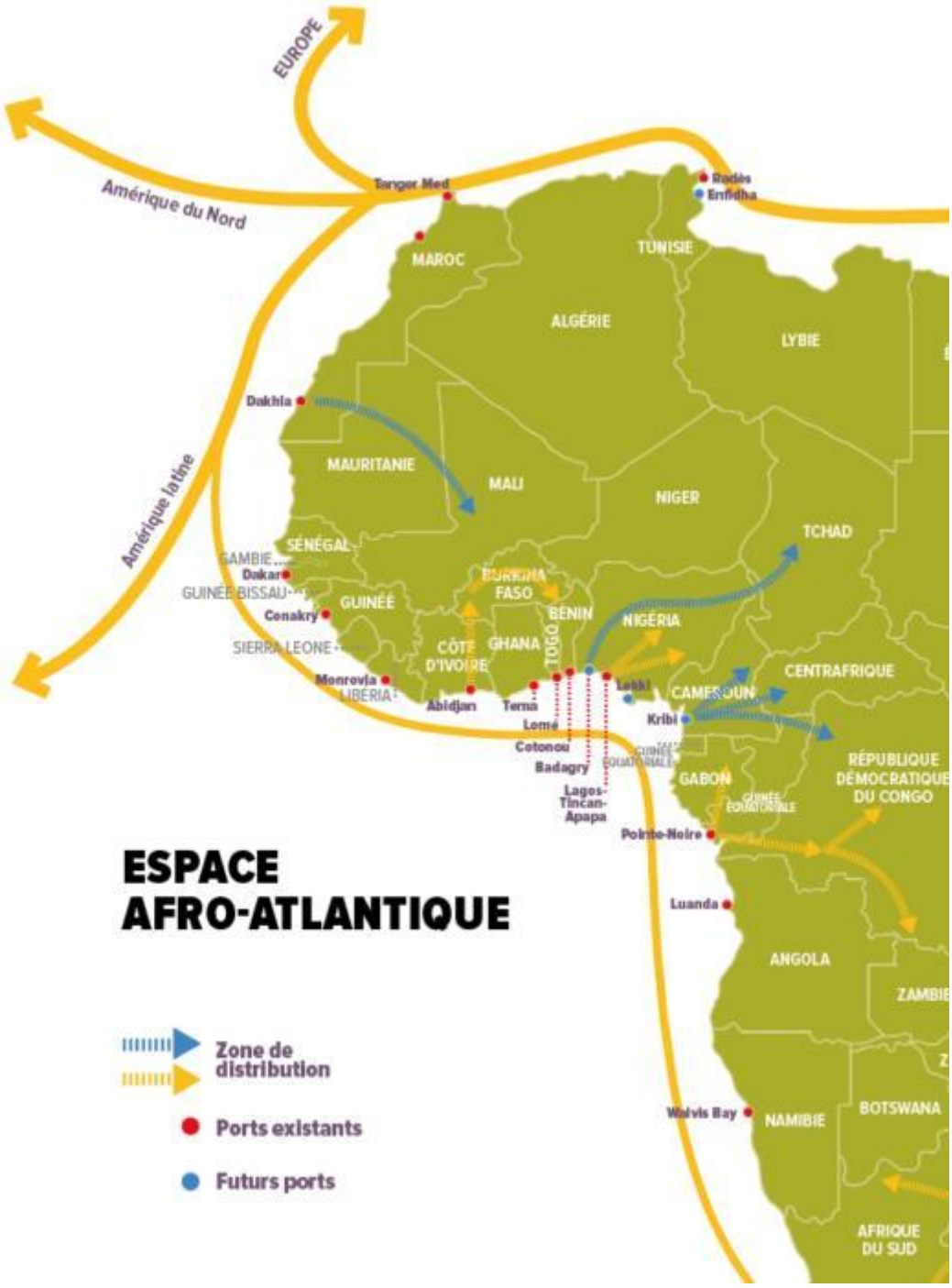
As plurilateral undertakings, they represent new pathways for regional integration, inter-regional cooperation, shared prosperity and security, and they create hubs of functionality and of strategic convergence in an increasingly dysfunctional and fragmented international system.

The Africa-Atlantic Backbone and the IMEC should be advanced, branded and promoted as **Sister Corridors.**

Images below:

Morocco, global strategic hub for prosperity through connectivity.




EUROPE
Amérique du Nord
Amérique latine
Tanger Med
Radès
Enfidha
MAROC
TUNISIE
ALGÉRIE
LYBIE
Dakhla
MAURITANIE
MALI
NIGER
TCHAD
SÉNÉGAL
GAMBIE
Dakar
GUINÉE BISSAU
GUINÉE
Conakry
SIERRA LEONE
BURKINA FASO
BÉNIN
NIGERIA
CÔTE D'IVOIRE
GHANA
TOGO
Monrovia
LIBERIA
Abidjan
Tema
Lomé
Cotonou
Badagry
Lagos-Tincan-Apapa
Lekki
CAMEROUN
Kribi
CENTRAFRIQUE
GABON
GUINÉE ÉQUATORIALE
RÉPUBLIQUE DÉMOCRATIQUE DU CONGO
Pointe-Noire
Luanda
ANGOLA
ZAMBIE
Walvis Bay
NAMIBIE
BOTSWANA
AFRIQUE DU SUD
ESPACE AFRO-ATLANTIQUE
Zone de distribution
Ports existants
Futurs ports