'Visions of Eurafrica' from L'Express (28 December 1956)

Caption: On 28 December 1956, in an article in the French weekly publication L'Express, Georges Boris, former adviser to Pierre Mendès France, harshly criticises plans to include the overseas countries and territories (OCT) in the European Economic Community (EEC).

Source: L'Express. dir. de publ. SERVAN-SCHREIBER, Jean-Jacques ; Réd. Chef VIANSSON-PONTÉ, Pierre; DANIEL, Jean. 28.12.1956, n° 288. Paris: L'Express. "Mirages de l'Eurafrique", auteur:Boris, Georges , p. 6.

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Visions of Eurafrica

By Georges Boris

Starting at the beginning of the year, Parliament will be asked to study the proposal for a European Common Market, which the Government has committed itself to initialling in early February.

The public, still unfamiliar with this proposal, is generally not aware that it represents a fundamental opportunity for French politics, an opportunity that will affect the country's entire future. Caught between the requirements of European integration and France's future involvement in Africa, the Government refused to choose and placed the European Common Market within the prospect of a grandiose project: EURAFRICA.

Below, Georges Boris studies these government projects in detail.

The difficult problems that the proposal for a European Common Market poses for France become particularly complicated if that Market must be extended to the overseas countries. It is doubtful whether those people among the public, in Parliament, and even in the Government, who find the word and the idea of Eurafrica appealing, fully understand their real meaning.

To reveal that meaning, we must first recall that, in a common market (which, in this case, consists of West Germany, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg and the Netherlands), goods will be free to move without any restriction, that is to say, without customs duties or quotas. Consequently, products from Germany, Belgium and so forth will naturally be bought by French consumers if those products represent better value than similar French products; and, by the same token, we shall sell French goods in the other five countries if our prices are lower than those of the national product (which, as we know, is not generally the case just now) (1).

As things stand, the overseas territories over which France has control constitute for France a favourable market: a system of preferential customs duties, quotas and licences for currency allocation favours our industry as well as our agriculture, so much so that, despite our higher prices, approximately 70 % of imports of the overseas territories consist of goods of French origin (500 out of 700 billion francs). The importance of this factor for the balance of our economy and for the prosperity of our industry has sometimes been exaggerated; it is, nevertheless, very important. From a purely material point of view, it constitutes, for metropolitan France, the positive element in the French Union's budget.

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Offsetting this material benefit, there are, naturally, material compensations. Against the outlets for our businesses (500 billion francs in sales for our producers and traders), we must not ignore France's expenditure on the overseas countries. They are:

1 — Sovereignty expenditure (administration, defence, etc.), which cost approximately 160 billion per annum in normal years (spending during wars, such as the one in Algeria, naturally increases this amount);

2 — French investment in the public sector, which is not generally profitable (roads, schools, hospitals, etc.), costs approximately 200 billion a year;

3 — The additional cost that French consumers pay when buying products from the overseas territories that are more expensive than similar products that they could obtain elsewhere. That additional cost adds up to several dozen billion per year (not to mention the products unnecessarily bought, like wine and spirits). In total, the cost borne by metropolitan France exceeds 400 billion.

Extending the Common Market to include the overseas countries would cause France to lose the advantage offered by this favourable market; the competition that would be established would result in a number of our industries losing their guaranteed outlets, while our European partners would see new export possibilities open up.

Such an important concession must, of course, be offset. Our negotiators have, therefore, asked the other European countries to relieve us of some of our burden.

However, it is difficult to imagine other European countries taking over some of our sovereignty expenditure without that implying that we are relinquishing sovereignty. On the other hand, although they are ready to allow products from the overseas countries to enter their countries duty free, they are not planning to do so, as we do, if that entails an additional cost. There goes a good half of our costs excluded from the sharing. What remains is the other half, which covers the public investment that we finance in our overseas countries.

At first, our negotiators tried in vain to have that cost allocated in proportion to the national revenue of each of the participating countries, then a 50-50 split between France, on the one hand, and its partners on the other. A solution was then envisaged whereby a French contribution of 200 billion would be supplemented by a global payment of 70 billion, which would mean that France would bear 75 % of the cost and the five countries the other 25 %.

In that event, in order to be admitted on an equal footing with us into the market in the overseas countries — which presently constitutes our essential assets — Germany would pay an annual contribution of approximately 30 billion, that is roughly 0.3 % of its national revenue, whereas our own contribution would not be less than 3 % of our national revenue.

Those figures speak for themselves.

But there is more to come. The latest news is that our partners, who are convinced that our Government intends to create Eurafrica at all costs, would no longer even consent to a meagre 25 % contribution. Last-minute bargaining will perhaps lead to the restoration of all or part of the mess of pottage to us. Otherwise, things will be left hanging in suspense, and it will be formally recorded that the Common Market will be extended to the overseas countries in accordance with conditions to be specified later. It is hoped that Parliament, which is entirely absorbed in its enthusiasm for Europe, will set out on the path towards the Common Market without worrying about the future of the French overseas territories and countries.

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One might say: it is unbelievable, and the advocates of the extension of the Common Market to the overseas countries must, of course, have a few arguments themselves. What are they?

Firstly, they say that there will be no immediate abandonment of the favourable market in the overseas countries, because the Common Market will be established gradually; in the interim, they add, French industry will adjust its cost prices and, eventually, find itself in a competitive position as much on the overseas market as on the French domestic market. That argument is meaningless because access to the overseas markets was never a condition that our partners considered necessary for the establishment of a European Common Market; in other words, the overseas market is, on France’s part, a supplementary contribution to which none of the other countries provides an equivalent (2).

Secondly, supporters of the Treaty state that they are relying on a different type of cooperation from the European countries, namely the investment of private capital in the development of the overseas countries and in the expansion of their markets from which we shall benefit in the long run. Such cooperation is certainly advantageous, but in no way does it require the inclusion of the overseas countries in a common market. In this instance, it is a matter of voluntary aid that will benefit — it goes without saying — only those enterprises which are sufficiently profitable to attract such capital: mineral or oil deposits to be exploited, export industries to be created (iron and steel industry, aluminium, paper industry, etc.). If the deal is a good one, private foreign capital will be invested in the market, with or without a common market. If the deal is not a good one, the Common Market will not make it more attractive.

Moreover, it is for similar reasons that our partners are so little disposed towards paying a price for the extension of the Common Market to the overseas countries. What we are offering them, namely underdeveloped countries to be developed or for business there, is, in their eyes, a very common commodity in the world that, they claim, may be found elsewhere. That does not mean that such is the case *for us*. But our reasons are not the same as those of our European partners: we have invested not only financial capital but human, moral, cultural, and even emotional capital, and, therefore, we have the right to expect a return that others cannot.

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Thus, negotiation of a common market extended to include the overseas countries ends in renunciation and abandonment. Is it our negotiators' fault: were they, perhaps, inadequate and lacking in skill?

It would be unfair to blame them, for it is in its very principle that a common market extended to include the overseas countries represents an abandonment.

In the inescapable and irreversible evolution of relationships between colonisers and colonised, the ties that hold together military and administrative presence seem to be loosening and unravelling. What keeps such countries bound to each other are economic and cultural ties (although the strength of the latter depends on the closeness of the former).

However, the essential economic tie is the unity of currency. This leads to the consumption of the same products, the adoption of similar lifestyles, and the orientation towards the same centre for funding, teaching, medical aid, cultural and tourist activities, etc. This unity is at the base of a reciprocity of interests, which is the prerequisite for the maintenance of a genuine community. The cohesion of the British Commonwealth essentially resides in the existence of the sterling area: the British, who are not considering incorporating their Empire into a common market, are well aware of that. In creating a franc area, we have equipped ourselves with the most effective weapon against centrifugal forces that are asking questions of the underdeveloped countries of which our Empire was composed.

The inclusion of the overseas countries in the European Common Market would result in the virtual abolition of the franc area and would dissolve the cement that binds together the basic elements of the French Union.

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The naive proponents of Eurafrica may not be aware of it, but there are, perhaps, Machiavellian minds for whom the extended Common Market constitutes a step towards the desired dissolution: they figure that, once the favourable market has gone, the French will wonder why they should continue to bear such a heavy financial burden in the overseas countries; once the currency tie is broken, the overseas countries will wonder why they should remain united with France.

Certain people may be behind such a plan. But is it the Government's plan? Parliament's? The public's? Is it conceivable that the country is travelling blindfold towards a future that it would steer away from if, it only knew?

G. B.

1. The preceding explanation applies only to industrial products, since agricultural products are excluded from the rules on free and

equal competition and must be subject to special rules.
2. Since, by virtue of international agreements, the Belgian Congo is already subject to the open door policy, Belgium will not be opening up a new market to its partners.