

'Three truths', from Corriere della Sera (19 March 1962)

Caption: On 19 March 1962, commenting on the signing of the Evian Accords, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera describes France's attitude towards Algerian independence.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 19.03.1962, n° 3; anno 1. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "Tre verita", auteur:Sansa, Giorgio , p. 1.

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Three truths

From our correspondent

Paris, 18 March, night-time.

The ceasefire and the Franco-Algerian Agreements signed in Evian at 5.30 p.m. today were the subject of General de Gaulle's seven-minute radio address, which can be summarised as follows: the Head of State will waste no time; he will put the long-awaited end of the war to a political purpose, asking the French people to endorse in a referendum France's Algeria policy that had now come to its end just as they had already endorsed it in a previous referendum, on 8 January 1961, at the beginning of its difficult and stormy implementation. The Head of State expressly wants this second direct consultation of the people because the opponents have not yet laid down their weapons and might be preparing for further battle.

General de Gaulle appeared satisfied and serene on the television screens. Admittedly there were at times traces of anger in his voice when he referred to the resistance and obstacles encountered, but it seemed to be the anger of a man who is sure of his facts. The conclusion of the Evian agreement is an indisputable demonstration that the two Governments do not consider the resistance of General Salan's 'secret army', the OAS, serious enough to justify postponing the Agreements, in other words that they believe the OAS can be eliminated. This elimination will be down to France; General de Gaulle has made it clear that he intends to dispose of this problem thanks to the good sense of the French people and the discipline of the French army.

General de Gaulle paid tribute to the solidarity and stability of the French population and also praised the army for managing to resist 'delinquent leaders' and 'criminal adventurers'. On the subject of the army, however, let us not forget that the General had, on previous occasions, already sung similar praises which had been a reflection of his expectations rather than of reality. As for the current situation, as recently as yesterday General Billotte declined the post of High Commissioner in Algeria during the transition period because he had been refused what he considered as the necessary resources to combat the OAS effectively; to include — according to rumours from Paris — the dismissal of several army officers in Algeria, including the Commander-in-Chief General Ailleret.

According to the French President, what has been decided and agreed in Evian reflects three truths. First of all, that the interests of France and the current situation in France, Algeria and the world call for an Algeria that is free to decide its own destiny. Secondly, that the two nations are destined to work in partnership, and the seven-year-war, with all its sorrows, must have convinced them of the need to walk side by side: differences of race, lifestyle and religion are not insurmountable. Finally, that Algeria needs France for its economic, technical and cultural progress, and because the Algerians who live in France can contribute through their work to their country's welfare.

At the end of his address, General de Gaulle announced the referendum in which the French are to cast their vote on the Agreements, saying, 'Frenchmen, in order solemnly to ratify what has been decided and to implement the consequences of what has been decided, despite some remaining obstacles, the Nation must clearly express its approval and conviction. I am therefore counting on you.'

Tomorrow, Monday, the Council of Ministers will assemble in an extraordinary session to take formal note of the treaties concluded and approve the decrees necessary for their implementation. This will be a pure formality given that the ceasefire comes into force at noon, three hours before the ministerial meeting. Parliament will convene at 10 a.m. on Tuesday. In both Chambers, a message from the President will be read out, followed by a ministerial declaration giving the full details of the Evian Agreements. As the Constitution does not allow a discussion of the Presidential message, only the declaration will be debated, but it will not be put to the vote unless a group of at least 53 Members present a motion of censure.

The conclusion of the armistice has been awaited with confidence for some days and has therefore come as no surprise. But the patience of the French people had been severely tested since Thursday because reports had repeatedly mentioned obstacles and delays, and at a certain point there had been some alarm. Since this

morning, radio broadcasts have been reporting the latest news from Evian every 30 minutes, so that eager listeners could follow the developments up to the decisive moment. At 6.01 p.m. the presenter finally announced, 'It is done, the Agreement has been signed'.

There is no doubt that everyone has welcomed the ceasefire with a great sigh of relief. But there can be no reason for exultation, because an opposition in the form of a conspiracy is threatening to sabotage the implementation of the Agreements and cause great unrest, in Algeria and perhaps also in France itself. The Government does not want to take any risks. This explains why the heavy gates outside the Elysée Palace were closed straight after the ceasefire announcement and why numerous armoured police vehicles have been stationed around the Presidential Palace. Anti-aircraft missiles have already been installed on the roofs of the surrounding buildings for the past week. No private vehicles may park in any of the streets housing Ministerial offices and there are more policemen present than pedestrians.

We now have to wait for the reaction from Algeria, particularly that of the Europeans. Agency reports received so far are that news of the armistice immediately spread in Algiers. People were whispering the message to each other in the streets, women told each other from door to door. Minutes later, everyone had gone home, cars had stopped, the already half-deserted streets became completely empty, windows were closed. Algiers has turned into a dead city. In Oran, the OAS stronghold, the reverse is true. But no serious incidents have been reported so far. The crowds have invaded the streets there and are chanting battle hymns in unison.

Giorgio Sansa