

'Charles de Gaulle and Algeria' from the Corriere della Sera (7 February 1962)

Caption: On 7 February 1962, the Italian daily newspaper Corriere della Sera outlines General de Gaulle's position on Algerian independence.

Source: Corriere della Sera. 07.02.1962, n° 32; anno 87. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "De Gaulle e l'Algeria", auteur:Guerriero, Augusto , p. 1.

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Charles de Gaulle and Algeria

General de Gaulle has claimed, 'The objective is about to be achieved.' The provisional Government of the Republic of Algeria has issued a statement saying, 'We have examined the latest developments of the Algeria issue and have taken appropriate decisions.' Unofficial sources from the National Liberation Front have declared, 'We have not yet reached a complete solution, but things are moving in the right direction.'

We would like to know a little more. Assuming that the agreement is close, what would its conditions be? General de Gaulle has deferred the revelation to a 'white paper' soon to be published and has confined himself to saying that 'France is ready to acknowledge a sovereign and independent Algeria and to enter into full cooperation providing that the French interests, especially in the Sahara, are respected and that the European minority population is guaranteed the right to participate in Algerian affairs.' These are the three main issues: 'an Algerian Algeria', the Sahara (and its oil resources) and the European minority.

(1) Everyone has been in agreement for some time that a sovereign and independent Algeria must become a reality. However, some issues concerning the intermediate period were still controversial: the constitution of the 'provisional executive', the defence of the territory during that period, the terms of the referendum through which the Algerian people would exercise their right to 'self-determination'.

But, frankly speaking, these issues were of great importance so long as the French were still hoping that the referendum might turn out in their favour. There is no doubt that, at the beginning of the Algerian crisis, the great majority of the population was on the side of the French, if for no other reason than that France was preserving law and order in the country and guaranteeing the daily bread of many hundreds of thousands of families.

In this perspective, it was considered that the conditions under which the plebiscite was held would determine its outcome. If the vote had taken place under French rule and if the population had been sure of being protected by the French army, not only on the election day but afterwards as well, many people would have found the courage to vote for France. But for some time now the French army has no longer been able to offer sufficient protection against the reprisals of the National Liberation Front. And it is a fact that the army will be gone tomorrow.

Under these conditions, who amongst the Muslims could be expected to vote for France only to get themselves assassinated some days later by their co-religionists? All things considered, it is not true that the fate of Algeria depends on the referendum. On the contrary, the outcome of the referendum depends on the fate of Algeria. And given that France has already lost Algeria, the outcome of the referendum has already been decided and it is pointless to keep arguing about the conditions under which it should take place.

(2) On the subject of the Sahara and its petroleum, General de Gaulle has also given in. The idea of a condominium of all the 'bordering' countries seemed brilliant inasmuch as it created a crucial interest for the countries in question to align themselves with France against the Algerian rebels and their claim to take control of everything. But this plan did not succeed and Tunisia's President Bourguiba, who was the most closely concerned, gave it the *coup de grace* on the day he ordered the attack on the naval base of Bizerta because General de Gaulle had kept him waiting for an answer. It appears that the agreement will be concluded on the following basis: France will exploit Saharan petroleum and pay the future Algerian Government royalties amounting to 50 %, plus 25 % for the right of way of the pipelines; a total, therefore, of 75 %.

(3) The only obstacle left to overcome was that of the European minority population. But this was a very serious obstacle against which the negotiations had already run aground many times. General de Gaulle had asked for guarantees for the European minority. The National Liberation Front refused to give any guarantee whatsoever. Did this mean that it reserved the right to reprisals and vendettas? It was basically this intransigent and menacing attitude of the Liberation Front that drove Algeria's European population into the arms of the Secret Army Organisation (the OAS). General de Gaulle's statement during his speech will not be sufficient to satisfy the Europeans in Algiers. 'They will be guaranteed a share in Algerian affairs.' Does

this mean they will have Algerian nationality? But this is not the only thing the Europeans down there are asking for. They want safety for their lives and possessions. And the extremists are asking for more.

This is what the situation looks like or, in other words, what it appears from a close interpretation of what General de Gaulle has said in this and previous speeches. But at the point where things now stand, the greatest doubt is not whether an agreement can be concluded but whether it can actually be implemented. The issues at stake between General de Gaulle and the OAS are tragic: would the French army obey if given the order to act against the OAS? Would it open fire against the French population of Algeria? General de Gaulle is convinced that it would obey, or at least he acts as if he were convinced. The OAS is convinced that the army would disobey. In either of these cases, the result would be a tragedy.

Those who care about the fate of France — and we Italians are certainly among them — hope that its army will be spared this terrible ordeal.

Augusto Guerriero