

'Morocco's independence exacerbates the Algerian problem' from Il nuovo Corriere della Sera (4 March 1956)

Caption: On 4 March 1956, the Italian newspaper Il nuovo Corriere della Sera comments on the independence of Morocco, highlighting the stance taken by France on the decolonisation process in North Africa.

Source: Il nuovo Corriere della Sera. 04.03.1956, n° 55; anno 81. Milano: Corriere della Sera. "L'indipendenza al Marocco aggrava il problema algerino", auteur:Sansa, Giorgio , p. 4.

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Morocco's independence exacerbates the Algerian problem

The decision will encourage many sides of the Chamber to vote against the Mollet Plan — Government likely to call for a vote of confidence

From our correspondent

Paris, 3 March, evening.

Yesterday Morocco won independence in principle, which will inevitably be followed by independence in law. This will happen soon, since, despite today's indignation in the right-wing press, it is impossible to believe that Parliament would go back on the Government's word in such a case: the Moroccan people, frustrated, would rise up as one and form that unity behind Sultan Mohammed Ben Youssef on which he cannot, in truth, at present rely.

Independence was granted to the Protectorate after only ten days of negotiations, and the text makes it subject to the conclusion of a future treaty of 'interdependence' on which negotiations will begin in the first half of March. Interdependence, an international concept that has no legal definition because there are no precedents, could obviously be much looser and far more fluid and changeable than the French are expecting and hoping; independence, however, is no longer open to discussion and, in this case, there is no going back. The French Government has therefore consciously taken a major risk.

Prime Minister Guy Mollet and Foreign Minister Christian Pineau will undoubtedly face the repercussions in the Chamber of the consternation with which traditionalist public opinion read, in today's papers, the declaration signed by the Pineau and the Moroccan Prime Minister, Mbarek Bekkai. Thursday's debate on Algeria will give opponents a golden opportunity to speak about Morocco and to link together all the problems of North Africa, just as they have always been plausibly linked. Pineau will certainly be told that negotiations with Tunisia, which have just begun, will now become difficult too, because the representatives of this second Protectorate will also want to obtain what Morocco has obtained for itself, and the agreements on Tunisian autonomy are therefore likely to prove outdated and anachronistic before they have even been put to the test.

Who is responsible?

The Government's response is predictable. It is already contained in yesterday's Franco-Moroccan declaration in which the two Governments state their determination to make fully operative the La Celle-Saint Cloud declaration of 6 November 1955. In other words, Pineau will defend himself by pointing out that the recognition of Moroccan independence dates back to that first diplomatic instrument and that the initial and irrevocable responsibility therefore lies with the leaders of that time, Edgar Faure and Antoine Pinay. Could the latter offer the excuse that there were reservations in their minds when they signed the La Celle-Saint Cloud documents and that, in practice, they did not attach their true significance to the words of the declaration? Obviously not.

It is precisely for these reasons that Morocco will weigh heavily in the debate on Algeria, since French North Africa is a whole even though it takes the form of three constitutionally different regions. It is very likely that many sides of the Chamber, smarting from the loss of standing in Morocco, will be even more determined to maintain their status in Algeria at all costs and not to incur the risk of over-generosity. The repercussions could well be seen in the vote on full powers for Algeria, which will in all likelihood be a vote of confidence.

The declaration grants independence in the following words: the two Governments 'note that, in view of Morocco's advance along the road to progress, the Treaty of Fez of March 30, 1912 is no longer consistent with the requirements of modern life and can no longer govern Franco-Moroccan relations. Consequently,

the French Government hereby solemnly confirms' (by 'confirming' this major step, responsibility is placed squarely on the shoulders of the previous government) 'its recognition of the independence of Morocco — which implies in particular the right to a diplomacy and an army — as well as its determination to respect, and to see to it that others respect, the integrity of Moroccan territory, as guaranteed by international treaties.'

In the declaration, the two countries are defined as 'equal and sovereign'; this is followed by a commitment to negotiate an agreement on interdependence, which, as a new concept in international law, is yet to be precisely defined; at present, the interested parties' ideas of that concept are very vague and divergent. Together with the declaration, the two Governments have signed a Protocol that fills the vacuum created by the de facto abrogation of the Treaty of Fez. The Protocol will regulate Franco–Moroccan relations until the treaty of interdependence has been concluded and ratified.

A solid guarantee

This event, which undoubtedly merits the epithet 'historic', brings up a whole range of issues. France has conceded, but has received something in return: it is obtaining a solid guarantee, at least for a certain period. Let us explain. The Sultan is no longer the absolute ruler of his homeland as he once was, but has many enemies, as evidenced by the insurrections in the Rif and other regions. He needs France and although, as authorised by yesterday's declaration, he may set up a Moroccan army, he will not lightly call for the revocation of the military prerogatives that France has retained in his country, because he would then stand alone against determined opponents, who are calling for a constitution and a parliamentary monarchy with the same fervour with which they have up to now fought against France. The greater the threat he faces, the stronger the link between the Sultan's authority and the former protectorate nation will be; France is likely to continue to be Morocco's protector even when there is no longer any legal foundation for such a relationship.

From an international point of view, it can be observed that the French Government has annulled a treaty, the Treaty of Fez, which was signed by twelve powers including, to cite only a few, Italy, Britain, Germany, Austria–Hungary, Tsarist Russia, Spain and the United States. The Treaty cannot therefore be abrogated in full, but only as regards matters affecting yesterday's two signatories. On the other hand, the protectorate regime that is being abolished has benefited only France, but the concept of independence cannot be confined to the territory of the French zone, since the Treaty of Fez related to Morocco as a whole. The Spanish zone and the international zone of Tangiers exist under contracts that could almost be called sub-leases.

What effect will yesterday's declarations and the future interdependence agreements have on the rights of the other powers? It is difficult to answer this question: we ask it merely to draw attention to a complicated facet of the situation. The Spanish Government has already made it known unofficially that it cannot be held responsible for an agreement signed without its participation. Christian Pineau, aware of these delicate aspects of the problem, was anxious to meet the Spanish ambassador, to whom he has explained the French point of view.

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