

AMBASSADORS FORUM

PEACE, STABILITY AND DEVELOPMENT: GOALS OF THE ALGERIAN REGIONAL DIPLOMACY

*Lecture by H.E.Mr. Abdelhamid Chebchoub, Ambassador of Algeria,
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Mr. Djordjevic

Your Excellencies Ladies and Gentlemen Ambassadors and diplomatic representatives

Ladies and Gentlemen

Dear Friends,

First of all, I would like to thank Dr. Branislav Djordjevic and his team for giving me the opportunity to introduce you to the Algerian diplomacy in the context of regional challenges and to discuss this topic with you.

OVERVIEW

Given the extent of the subject, its timeliness and multiple linkages with developments on the international level on one hand, and the time available, on the other, I will be as brief as possible in providing you with key elements contributing to the understanding of the topic, thus securing enough time for a discussion as well.

Firstly, I will evoke the cornerstones of Algeria's foreign policy that might help you understand better Algeria's positions on all international issues.

Then, I will identify the main political, security and humanitarian challenges the Algerian diplomacy has been facing on the regional level in the recent years as well as the actions taken by the Algerian diplomacy in managing these challenges on both bilateral and regional levels as well as multilaterally.

GEOGRAPHICAL LOCATION

Algeria, a central country of the Maghreb, sharing more than 6000 km of borders with 7 neighboring countries, open towards Europe along 1200km of its

Mediterranean coast and with its South deeply rooted in Africa, is located at the crossroad of a zone of the strategic importance and as such a subject to instability.

Crises that the region experienced over the last few years, their severity and evolution coupled with foreign interferences have threatened Algeria's own security, caused a negative impact on its development agenda and became a source of concern for safeguarding its sovereignty, as well as a factor of instability in this part of the world.

The Algerian response to these crises has been based on the fundamental principles of its diplomacy.

ALGERIAN DIPLOMACY FOUNDATIONS

Understanding the Algeria's international positions of today would not be possible without reminding of the foundations of its diplomacy, set during the National Liberation War.

At the outset of the Independence, Algeria adopted a foreign policy whose principles were rooted in its own struggle for national emancipation, namely, independence, national sovereignty, people's right to self-determination, non-interference in the internal affairs of the States, peaceful settlement of disputes, respect of the international borders and rejection of any form of interventionism.

Based on these principles, Algeria has set as the priority objectives of its diplomacy to search for peace and stability of the region and worldwide, to contribute to the peaceful settlement of crises, as well as to the implementation of such regional or international economic cooperation guaranteeing the people's welfare in dignity and respect for human rights and the sovereignty of States.

I will give you a few examples.

AN ACTIVE DIPLOMACY TACKLING MULTIPLE AND MULTIFACETED CHALLENGES

Tunisia

In the beginning of 2011, in the context of Tunisia's political transition, violent groups emerged threatening the stability of Tunisia but also the security of the region.

Algeria, which has excellent relations with Tunisia, has spared no effort to provide assistance to this country, through a financial support to strengthen its economy and through assistance in fighting terrorism.

Libya

In its immediate neighborhood, Algeria faces the crisis in Libya, whose instability is a source of concern and a threat to the security of the region.

Given the nature of the Libyan regime set up by Gaddafi, Libya found itself after the foreign intervention in 2011 without a state structure or an organized military force unable to manage the post-conflict situation.

Consequentially, this has resulted in a proliferation of arms and the emergence of militias and terrorist groups whose actions have spread from initially targeted northern cities of Tripoli, Sirte and Benghazi, throughout the desert area from Libya to northern Mali and Niger via Southern Algeria.

From the beginning of the crisis, Algeria had warned against foreign intervention and its consequences and pleaded for a peaceful solution. Unfortunately, our voice was not heard. Since 2014, Libya has plunged even deeper into a chaos and divisions.

At the request of various Libyan parties, Algeria has initiated a mediation process through dialogue to end the crisis. In order to bring the positions of rival militant factions closer together, Algiers had hosted several series of meetings.

Unlike the initiatives of some countries which were guided solely by their own political or economic self-interests, Algeria's efforts were aimed exclusively at restoring the stability and peace in the region.

Moreover, Algeria's initiative has been aligned with the UN efforts and carried out in consultation with the neighboring countries of Libya and in coordination with the African Union, which are as much as Algeria concerned for the stability of Libya.

Algeria's initiative has been articulated around the following axes:

- Ensuring preservation of the national unity of the Libyan people, the territorial integrity and the sovereignty of Libya.
- Giving primacy to an inclusive dialogue involving all parties without discrimination, with the exception of terrorist groups.
- Rejecting foreign interference in any form.
- Encouraging internal dialogue between Libyans.
- Building democratic institutions.

The process initiated by Algeria as well as the support of the international community made it possible to bring the positions closer together and led to the signing of the Political Agreement signed on 17 December 2015, which is used now as a framework for solving the Libyan crisis.

I want to underline for this purpose, the visit of our Minister of Foreign affairs, M. Abdelkader Messahel to Libya, where he had contacts with all involving parties.

Western Sahara

The frozen conflicts are another source of concern. Of particular concern is the decades-long conflict in Western Sahara which causes regional tensions, threatens its peace and security and undermines its development efforts.

Algerian position on this issue is clear and it matches fully the one of the international community. Being a non-decolonized territory, Western Sahara has been listed in the UN list of Non-Self-Governing Territories. Hence, the settlement of this conflict falls within the scope of implementation of the United Nations doctrine on decolonization.

The UN has always considered that any solution must be consistent with the principles and objectives of the United Nations Charter and implemented through the organization of a referendum on self-determination for which the United Nations Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established in 1991.

Consequently, Algeria supports the efforts of the Secretary-General and his Personal Envoy for Western Sahara to find a solution by organizing a referendum on self-determination, as foreseen in the Security Council and the African Union resolutions.

The Sahel Region

The crisis in Libya has been a fertile ground for the strengthening of terrorist groups operating in the Sahel region, thus increasing the already existing instability in Northern Mali and Niger.

In Mali, claims based on identity or community politics were manipulated by terrorist groups that managed to occupy a large part of the Malian territory and to threaten its capital Bamako in early 2012.

This led to the French army intervention known as the Operation Serval. The subsequent Operation Barkhan enabled France to keep its military presence in the Sahel.

At the request of Mali's President Boubacar Keita in 2014, Algeria accepted to assist in the organization of negotiations between the Malian government and the political-military groups of northern Mali.

After several rounds of the inclusive inter-Malian dialogue, the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali resulting from the Algerian mediation, known as "the Algiers Process", was signed on May 15, 2015. This agreement stipulates a series of commitments made by the parties to strengthen peace.

- a) respect for the national unity, territorial integrity and sovereignty of the State of Mali, as well as its republican form and secular character;

- b) recognition and promotion of cultural diversity and appreciation of the contribution made by all the people of Mali, particularly women and young people, in building the nation;
- c) effective management by the population of their own affairs, in a system of governance which takes into accounts their aspirations and specific needs;
- d) promotion of balanced development throughout the regions of Mali taking into account their respective potential;
- e) rejection of violence as a means of political expression, and the use of dialogue and consultation to resolve differences;
- f) respect for Human Rights, human dignity and fundamental and religious freedoms;
- g) the fight against corruption and impunity;
- h) the fight against terrorism, drug trafficking and other forms of international organized crime.

As in the case of Libya, Algeria aligned this initiative with the relevant framework of the United Nations thus ensuring the support of the World Organization.

TERRORISM AND ORGANIZED CRIME

Taking advantage of poor means of some States or in some cases, a total absence of State authorities in the desert areas where they can move more easily, the terrorist groups operating in Libya and those active in the Sahel region, have interconnected (the terrorist groups in Mali, Boko Haram in the Western and Central African regions, various al-Qaeda-related groups, and others) or have even linked up with groups operating in the Middle East -Orient, Syria and Iraq, such as DAECH (ISIS).

It should be noted that terrorist groups are connected to weapons, drug and human trafficking networks and smuggling activities across the region, these activities being an important source of financing of the terrorism and another serious threat to the security of the region.

Algeria, which has suffered from the scourge of terrorism and fought it alone, while the rest of the world has shown nothing but indifference, has never stopped raising awareness about the criminal and cross-border nature of this phenomenon, about links between terrorism and organized crime, drugs and arms trafficking and the need for a joint mobilization of all countries to fight it.

The latest terror attacks in Europe and elsewhere have, unfortunately, once again, confirmed the relevance of Algerian analysis and stance.

Algeria is also striving to ban the payment of ransoms, which we consider as another source of terrorist financing. This idea has been increasingly shared by the international and regional partners.

Today, there is an international awareness of the criminal nature of terrorism and the need for international cooperation and solidarity to deal with it.

It is this vision and expertise in fighting terrorism which Algeria has been today widely recognized for by the international community.

Algeria acts on the national, regional and international levels:

At the national level: in parallel with the strengthening of the security system, Algeria has undertaken a twofold action towards the society:

- A national reconciliation policy launched by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika to erase the aftermath of the 1990s and rebuild what terrorism had destroyed.
- A de-radicalizing policy and a policy aimed at fighting religious aberrations by promoting the values of peace and tolerance proper to Islam.

These policies allowed Algeria to restore peace and internal security.

At the regional level: several mechanisms for coordinating and exchanging information have been initiated by Algeria and set up with neighboring countries to combat terrorism.

Algeria has initiated the establishment of an African Study and Research Center on Terrorism. Its headquarters is now based in Algiers. Similarly to the Interpol, the African police institution the *Afripol* was set up last May in Algiers as well.

At the international level, Algeria is a founding member and an active member of the Global Counter-Terrorism Forum and it shares with Canada the group on the Sahel.

Algeria has also established bilateral channels of cooperation in the fight against terrorism with several States, primarily with the United States and France.

HUMAN MIGRATION

The issue of human migration has been on the European agenda for the last three years. Algeria has been dealing with it over the last three decades!

Fleeing poverty, drought, or security problems and looking for a brighter future in prosperous Algeria, thousands of people from Sahel have settled firstly in the southern regions of the country. Others progressed towards the big northern cities. Today, Algeria is a home to several thousands of migrants from these countries, but to Syrians as well.

After being a country of transit, Algeria has become a country of illegal residence of these migrants.

Algeria has made arrangements for hosting these migrants as well as for their voluntary repatriation in dignity and in coordination with their countries of origin.

However, we believe that this issue is not a problem of a single country or a single region, but rather an appeal to the consciousness of the entire international community. We do not agree with the northern countries approach which perceive this problem from the security point of view exclusively and demand from the countries of the southern Mediterranean to play the role of the police.

In Algeria's opinion, the search for an adequate response to the migration issue should be based on the eradication of its causes. This should be achieved through a peaceful resolution of crises and developmental actions guided only by the interest of the affected regions.

ECONOMIC SUPPORT ACTIONS

In that respect, Algeria carries out bilateral actions of economic cooperation.

To support the human resources development of the neighboring countries, every year Algeria hosts hundreds of students from African countries, namely from Mali and Niger providing them with an adequate education and training.

Moreover, Algeria takes part in the training of security forces of its neighbors.

In 2010, Algeria cancelled the debts of several African countries, worth more than 900 million dollars.

In addition to the above-mentioned solidarity actions in favor of the neighboring countries, Algeria is one of the founding countries of NEPAD (New Partnership for Africa's Development) and an active member of development projects initiated by the African Union.

As an example of the structuring projects in which Algeria has been one of the stakeholders, it is worth mentioning the Trans-Saharan highway, Algiers-Lagos pipeline or deployment of optic fiber on the sections of the Trans-Sahara Highway, thus interconnecting the whole continent and making the new information technologies available to all African peoples.

CONCLUSION

I apologize for having taken so much of your time. I am aware of the extent of the subject, but I hope that this overview has helped you understand the Algerian diplomacy in the light of challenges at the beginning of the century.

The regional role of Algeria and its contribution to the search for the peace and stability has been praised by the international community which recognized the efficiency and impartiality of the Algerian diplomacy.

These are not the flattering words of an ambassador. Numerous successful mediation activities of the Algerian diplomacy in favor of the peace speak for themselves.

Our diplomatic action has been consistent and coherent in all times and circumstances.

Regardless of difficulties, changes in the world, stakes or pressures, the search for peace, stability and development remains one of the priorities of our diplomacy.

Thank you for your attention.