

Abstract

DE GAULLE'S EUROPEAN POLICY: BETWEEN THIRD-FORCISM AND ANTI- SUPRANATIONALISM

Charles de Gaulle is one of the few politicians in the last century that has been able to strongly influence and determine the events, most of the times in a crucial way. The General left always a personal mark on his political decisions and actions and, deeply investing on his ideas, he often struggled in order to affirm his point of view and his proposals. This statement is clearly confirmed by de Gaulle's European policy during the 50s-60s and the aim of this thesis is to investigate the reason why he conducted such a resolute foreign policy.

De Gaulle's goal was the creation of an European community based, in opposition to any supranational project, on national governments and intergovernmental cooperation, without overlooking any national interest and will. His concept of Europe provided an "Europe of states", where any singular nation would have maintained its own sovereignty without the interference of supranational institutions. According to such an intergovernmental vision, the European Community should have included all the countries from the Atlantic to the Urals. The French nation, recovering its power and abandoning the medium power role status performed since the defeat of the Second World War, would have

played a leading role in an European Community gradually more independent to act as a third continental actor.

His foreign policy during his presidency was completely finalized to achieve the affirmation of French power, importance and historical mission in the international relations context, as it had been until the Second World War. According to the General's view, French national supremacy could have been recognized and maintained only through the comparison with the other European and international world powers. For this reason, foreign policy played, during those years, a central and prominent role in French government policy, while national policy was conceived as a functional instrument for the affirmation of French nation power. Central in de Gaulle's ideological universe, the concept of nation guided and determined all his political decisions.

In order to understand the effective role played by the French politician, we will first examine his position concerning the main stages of the European integration process. We will start, in the first chapter of this essay, from the analysis of the gaullist aversion to the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) established in 1951 and for the Pleven Plan's proposal of an European Defense Community (EDC), unsuccessful project, since the French Parliament refused to approve its text in 1954, with a large majority, made from several parties and in particular from the gaullist party, that did not accept the limitation of the French independence and the consequent subordination to the Anglo-Americans that the ratification of the EDC treaty would have produced. As a matter of fact, the General tried, during all his presidency, to affirm European and especially French independence from the American effort to subordinate western European countries to its control and to use them as allies against the USSR. That is reason why de Gaulle was hostile also to the British attempt to intervene, in a larger measure, in European continental countries

decisions: the General was firmly convinced that the Great Britain was the “horse of Troy” of the United States of America. Hiding their real interests behind the European British nation, the United States would have been following and their final aim: reducing Europe in a submitted power that could have contributed in the struggle against the soviet regime. Charles de Gaulle could not absolutely allow this kind of project and overlook French political and economic effective interests and targets. He wanted to reaffirm the *grandeur* and the *élan vital* to its traditional and worthy owner: France.

With his “politics of *grandeur*” de Gaulle attempted to promote an independent foreign policy and a strong presence on the international stage. These kind of ideas and principles but also the belief that France would have been the *nation animatrice* with the role of guide for European countries in the pursue of independence from the two blocks, especially in political and security questions, can help us in the effort of painting a clearly understanding portray of the European political action of de Gaulle.

We will make an attempt to explain de Gaulle’s ambiguous position on the stipulation of the Treaties of Rome, signed in 1957, that resulted in their unexpected approval by the gaullist leader. Criticized from the gaullist movement as a mere reproduction of the previously rejected EDC treaty, when de Gaulle was elected to the French presidency in 1958, the treaties of Rome were already in force. Even if the General’s disagreement about the Common Market was already well-known, he decided to respect the treaties of Rome and to exploit the newly born European Economic Community (CEE) in order to follow his desire to create an independent “European Europe” led by the French nation. A strong and independent Europe necessarily needed to be held by friendly and collaborative relationships between the main European powers: France and Germany. That is the reason why de Gaulle attempted

to re-establish a trust relation with Adenauer and, consequently, to use the new friendship as an instrument to limit British interference in European continental affairs.

We will realize how the famous *memorandum* of 1958, sent by the General to the Anglo-Americans, was nothing else than an effort to create a new configuration of the power relations in the Atlantic Alliance finalized to the affirmation of a more independent European ally that could effectively play a determinant role in NATO's decisions. The *memorandum* proposed the submission of the military integrated organization to a tripartite direction of the three nuclear powers: United States, Great Britain and France.

Of great relevance for our study will be the Fouchet Plan and the gaullist proposal of creation of an European confederation that, guaranteeing the respect for any national sovereignty, should have been cooperating in political, cultural and defense questions. But the attention for the Fouchet Plan was substituted by the interest for the English application of adhesion to the EEC in 1961. Great Britain initially declined to join the Common Market and joined the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), a trade organization alternative to the European Community, mostly consisting of Northern European countries. Realizing that the EEC was a stronger trade bloc than EFTA, the British government asked to join the EEC during a difficult economic circumstance that was taking place in Great Britain during those years. Convinced that the entrance of the Great Britain into the Common Market would have transformed the European continent in an American satellite for economic and military matters, de Gaulle resolutely decided to put the veto on the English application.

The deterioration of the relationship between the two countries was so irrecoverable that somebody started to talk about a "problem of de Gaulle", but at the same time de Gaulle and

Adenauer formalized the newly-born French-German alliance with the signature of the Élysée Treaty in 1963. The Élysée Treaty, also known as the Treaty of Friendship laid the foundation for French-German relationship and ended centuries of rivalry between the two countries.

In the central part of this thesis we will try to explain the reason why one of the most serious and dangerous crisis of the European Community took place during de Gaulle's presidency. Discussing about the financing of the common agricultural policy (CAP), in 1965, the President of the European Commission, Walter Hallstein proposed to create EEC's own financial resources, not dependent from the Member States, and at the same time to confer additional budgetary powers on the European Parliament. Hallstein's proposal planned also the recognition of a greater role to the European Commission, the supranational organism of the Community.

The French president, always opposed to any supranational development of the Community institutions, could not absolutely accept such an attempt to usurp national sovereignty in favor of a communitarian integration that would have surely overlooked national interests and priorities. But what worried more the General was the progression provided in the Treaties of Rome, on 1 January 1966, to the third stage of the transitional period for the establishment of the Common Market, that would have consisted in the application of qualified-majority voting in the Council of Ministers. De Gaulle could not agree to this development, considered as an unacceptable renunciation of sovereignty. Moreover, the General criticized the President of the Commission for having prepared his budgetary proposal without prior consultation of the governments of the Member States and for having acted like a Head of State.

On 1 July 1965, after ineffective negotiations, the French Government recalled to Paris the French Permanent Representative

in Brussels and declared that France would have not participate to the meetings of the Council of Ministers until a solution would not have been found.

This episode is known as the "empty chair" crisis because France, expressing its disapproval, abstained from Council proceedings for seven months from 30 June 1965 onwards. It was the first time since the entry into force of the Treaties of Rome that the EEC had been prevented from operating by the actions of a Member State. The French empty chair policy was interrupted by the Luxembourg Compromise, signed on 30 January 1966. It states that :

Where, in the case of decisions which may be taken by majority vote on a proposal of the Commission, very important interests of one or more partners are at stake, the Members of the Council will endeavour, within a reasonable time, to reach solutions which can be adopted by all the Members of the Council while respecting their mutual interests and those of the Community.

The Luxembourg Compromise, being only a political declaration by Foreign Ministers, cannot amend the Treaty and it did not prevent the Council from taking decisions in accordance with the Treaties of Rome, that affirmed that for a series of situations qualified-majority voting must be applied. As many scholars state, the Luxembourg Compromise was not a real compromise, the Six did not reach an effective agreement, but an "agreement on the disagreement". Thus, far from being an effective solution, the Compromise of Luxembourg represented a watershed between the first dynamic phase of the European integration and the stalemate period that characterized the years between the end of the 60s and the 80s.

Finally, we will focus our attention on the more criticized and controversial decision taken by the French leader during those years: the French withdrawal from NATO. Not accepting the strong and prominent role played by the United States in the integrated

military structure and their evident special relationship with the Great Britain, de Gaulle, on 7 March 1966, announced to the American President Johnson his decision of withdrawing French forces from the military integrated structure of NATO and all non-French NATO troops were asked to leave France. This resolute decision, shared by few politicians and collaborators of the General, clearly shows the anti-Americanism implied in the gaullist foreign policy.

De Gaulle wanted to affirm a third-force Europe that could have been an independent actor from the two block powers. He did not withdraw from the Atlantic Alliance because he knew its vital importance for French security interests: he withdrew France from NATO because he realized that a modification of the Atlantic military organization was necessary and he was convinced that a redefinition of France-NATO relationship was unpostponable.

Such a radical political decision provoked several and different reactions. The Atlantic Allies were prepared enough to a French withdrawal from the organization since de Gaulle's dissatisfaction for the power distribution inside the Atlantic Alliance was well-known. As a matter of fact, the French President made his opinion clear since the *memorandum* of 1958 when he proposed a revision of the NATO's relations with the creation of a tripartite executive board conducted by the three nuclear powers and reaffirmed his position several times during those years. When de Gaulle's announced the French withdrawal, the Anglo-Americans accused him of taking an unilateral decision without having consulted the allies. They were also worried about all the consequences that the transition from the integration to the French "cooperation" would have brought about.

Even if the unilateral decision of the 1966 has been widely criticized, we cannot state that the real intention of the General was a sterile boycotting of the NATO, but, on the contrary, the

apparently selfish act of the French government produced an unthinkable re-legitimation of the Alliance and a more conscious awareness of the importance and the irreplaceability of the Alliance for the European security and stability. His intentions did not absolutely look destructive but, contrarily, they brought about a positive refounding of France-NATO relationship. While struggling for the affirmation of his vision of Europe and European integration, de Gaulle succeeded in advancing the interests and increasing the prestige of France.