



Stability and progress

INTERVIEW WITH H.E. ABDELMALEK SELLAL

PRIME MINISTER OF THE PEOPLE'S DEMOCRATIC REPUBLIC OF ALGERIA

How would you define the Algerian national identity and the associated characteristics?

The Islam-Arabism-Tamazight identity is the bedrock of the Algerian identity. The several thousand years of the history of our country, now one of the largest in Africa, and the many civilisations that have marked it, have shaped 'Algerianism', with its plural characteristics.

In other words, I would simply say that the Algerian has the piety of the Muslim, the wisdom of the African, the Mediterranean mood, the Arab chivalry, and the Berber pride.

What is the current security situation in Algeria? What can you say to reassure tourists and investors who are concerned on this issue?

Without any exaggeration, Algeria is among the safest and most stable countries in the Middle East and Africa. The terrorist phenomenon has been reduced, thanks to the results of the national reconciliation policy and the efforts of our security forces. The efficiency of the Algerian approach, both political and operational, against terrorism is widely recognised and is regarded as a model approach around the world.

Starting from its own experience, my country has called for worldwide coordinated action to criminalise the arming and financing (notably through the payment of ransoms) of a now-transnational terrorism, which is the close ally of the drug trafficking and money laundering criminal networks.

Algeria is also working to resolve conflict situations experienced by our neighbouring countries, especially in the Sahel region, by promoting an inclusive dialogue, underpinned by the respect of international law and governed by the territorial integrity of these countries.

To tourists, I would say come and visit a country where one can have the four seasons in the same day, depending which region you are in. A diverse country made up of sea, steppe, mountain and desert. A virgin country with a warm and welcoming people. A quiet and secure country to enjoy holidays and leisure.

For British investors and businessmen, the only risk they may face in Algeria is being preceded and overtaken by others, because as you say in your language, Algeria is "the place to be" for business and investment opportunities.

The comparative advantages of the Algerian economy

are numerous. First, there is sustainable political and macroeconomic stability, as well as energy costs which are among the lowest in the world. Our location ensures proximity to major international markets and we have a young and skilled workforce with very competitive levels of remuneration.

Besides which, there is a very dynamic local market, with more than 35 million consumers, a public banking system with real capabilities for project financing, and a national network of infrastructure, especially in the transport and ICT sectors.

What is the current rate of economic growth in your country, and what are your economic priorities in the coming three to five years?

Algeria has recorded an annual growth rate of 3-4 per cent. During the same period, the gross domestic production has increased by 330 per cent (from 4.123bn DZD to 17.771bn DZD) and unemployment has fallen from 29.8 per cent in 2000 to 9.8 per cent. National foreign exchange reserves have improved, while our external debt is only US\$3.4 billion. The inflation rate has been maintained below 4 per cent.

Gross national income per capita increased from US\$ 1,458 in 2000 to US\$ 5,090 in late 2013. Combined with the continued decline in the rate of unemployment, this parameter has boosted domestic consumption, increased savings and boosted the tax revenues of the State. The availability of credit, particularly to the private sector, has experienced exponential growth, thus facilitating national investment.

Public procurement has also boosted growth. Since 2000, three successive five-year plans were implemented for the economic and social development of the country. The goal was to catch up after the years of fighting against terrorism, and to endow the country with basic, modern facilities.

The government's ambition for the next five years is to continue the development of the country, preserve the positive balance of the national economy, reaching a 7 per cent growth rate and a significant decrease in the unemployment rate, especially among the youth. The fourth five-year plan for 2015-19 gives priority to industry, agriculture, energy, tourism, and the digital industries. Investment and partnership projects in these areas will be encouraged and supported through many land, financial and tax benefits.

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Opposite:
HE Abdelmalek Sellal,
Prime Minister of Algeria

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How has Algeria reformed its political, economic, and social structures since the recent revolutions in Tunisia, Libya, and Egypt? Why has Algeria experienced no such revolution?

The Algerians had their revolution in 1954. It lasted seven long years and left one and a half million martyrs. We should let historians and political scientists study the experiences of a number of countries in the region and then make their own assessment.

Algeria was also a pioneer in political openness in the Arab world. Our multiparty system was launched in 1989, with excesses that almost destroyed the republican state and led the country into long years of pain and bloodshed. The policy of national reconciliation, initiated and led by Abdelaziz Bouteflika, President of the Republic, has saved the country and moved it towards a focus on reconstruction and economic growth.

Since then, there has been a sustained and permanent reform process. Several laws have been enacted in the areas of gender equality, freedom of expression, civil society, political parties and the ‘moralisation’ of politics. The positive results of this approach are self-evident. These include the great increase in the number of elected women in parliament and local assemblies (30 per cent required), and the opening of the audiovisual industry to private enterprise.

How significant is the 60th anniversary of the November 1954 Revolution?

The Revolution of November 1st 1954 evokes among all Algerians the greatest achievement of their nation in the 20th century. Beyond the heroic struggle for liberation and a freedom gained at the cost of hundreds of thousands of martyrs, the Revolution has laid the foundations for the modern Algerian State; I would remind you in this regard that the first objective set by the call of 1st November 1954 was the building of a democratic and social State.

Furthermore, this is a collegial achievement, without a unique charismatic leader, where the true hero was encouraged by the people. This inspires our action to mobilise our fellow citizens around the major national projects for the welfare for all.

Finally, the war of national liberation has set in stone the principles of the Algerian nation in terms of its respect for the independence and sovereignty of countries and peoples, the right to self-determination, the rejection of interference and solidarity with peoples struggling for their freedom.

What is your perspective on the future of Africa as a major economic and trading bloc?

Certainly, Africa is experiencing political and security tensions, as well as bottlenecks in development.

However, I remain convinced that this continent is the future of humanity and that, in many ways, it will shape the world’s future destiny.

Algeria, led by President Abdelaziz Bouteflika, has been one of the founding countries of the New Partnership for Africa’s Development (NEPAD). Through this mechanism, and others, it works for the promotion of South-South partnership and for the emergence of Afro-African development models.

African governments embrace the option of interacting with other international players as an economic and political bloc. Frameworks of dialogue and cooperation have been established with the United States, China, the European Union, Latin America and other partners in the world, allow Africa to be viewed beyond the stereotypes and justly measure its wonderful human, natural and strategic potential. We think that this approach is the right one and that it is mutually beneficial.

How do you see the evolution of Algeria’s role in the world over the short and longer term?

After the consolidation of its political and institutional system, Algeria must now focus on modernising and diversifying its economy. It must also work to preserve its position as an energy power with its large fossil and renewable resources.

Its potentialities, the vitality of its economy, its young population and the credibility and consistency of its governments’ stances should naturally lead Algeria to play a major role in the international relations of Africa, the Arab world and the whole Mediterranean region.

How would you describe the Algerian-British bilateral relationship?

At the political level, relations are excellent. We have full convergence of views about most international issues and those of common interest. However, the level of the trade and the economic partnership is below the aspirations and the expectations of both governments, given our potential and the various fields of convergence and complementarity.

Indeed, it is precisely for the purpose of promoting the economic relations between Algeria and the UK that I will visit London on December 10th, accompanied by several ministers and managers of private companies, to attend the Algerian-British Forum on Trade and Investment.

We need now to build together a mutually beneficial economic relationship by establishing a win-win cooperation. British companies have their place in our country alongside their Algerian counterparts. Let us, therefore, move forward together, in good faith.

Biography of HE Abdelmalek Sellal

Name: Sellal

First name: Abdelmalek

Date and place of birth:

1 August 1948 Constantine

Education:

- Diploma from the National Administration School

Professional Career:

- Administrator, technical counsellor, chef de cabinet in the province of Guelma
- Technical counsellor at the ministry of national education
- Head of the Daira administrative district at Tamanrasset-Arzew
- Governor of Boumerdes-Adrar-Sidi Bel Abbes-Oran - Laghouat
- Governor (hors classe) for the interior minister
- Chef de cabinet for the foreign minister
- Director general of resources at the foreign ministry
- Ambassador to Hungary
- Minister of Interior, Local Government and Environment
- Minister of Youth and Sport
- Minister of Public Works
- Minister of Transport
- Minister of Water Resources
- Minister of Water Resources and interim transport minister
- 3 September 2012 appointed Prime Minister
- 28 April 2014 reappointed Prime Minister



SONATRACH: Driving Growth

SONATRACH is the Algerian state company for the research, exploitation, pipeline transportation, processing and marketing of hydrocarbons and their by-product. Its purpose is to make an optimum use of its national hydrocarbon resources and create wealth to serve the country's social and economic development.

As an integrated oil and gas company, SONATRACH is a major player in the oil and gas sector. Sonatrach is today the first hydrocarbons company in Africa and the Mediterranean. It carries out its activities in four main fields: Upstream, Downstream, Pipeline Transportation, Marketing and petrochemistry.

It participates in various projects with different partners in Africa, Latin America and Europe.

Since its inception, SONATRACH has managed to acquire a strong capacity to integrate new technologies, to establish a proven and reliable presence in international liquid and gaseous hydrocarbons markets and to capitalise on its experience of partnership with international companies of different sizes and different geographic origins.

It has also adapted to the new global economic environment by diversifying its activities and, therefore, is expanding in other economic niches including mining, power generation, water, air and sea transport, among others.

Today, SONATRACH is asserting itself not only as an international oil and gas-oriented group but also as a supportive, responsible and Citizen Company.

It is committed to the economic, social and cultural development of the population; it has set essential priorities in terms of HSE, and became resolutely involved in environmental protection and ecosystems preservation. ■

