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Letter to Florence Parly: the defense minister is silent, the President replies

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On 18 June 2020, the 80th anniversary of de Gaulle famous appeal in 1940, the president of ACDN (Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire) had written to Mme Florence Parly, the minister of defense, sending copies to the President of the Republic, to the then PM, and to several other eminent leaders.

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Three months later the minister has still not replied, but the President has now done so and is encouraging her to do the same, via a letter from his cabinet head dated and posted on 14 September 2020:

" Monsieur le Président,

"The President of the Republic has received a copy of your correspondence sent to Madame Florence PARLY, minister of defense, and has given me the task of thanking you for it.

"Be assured that the Head of State has taken note of your observations concerning our nation's defense policy.

I have not failed to draw Madame PARLY's attention to your message.

Plese accept my good wishes,

Yours faithfully,

"Brice BLONDEL"

This missive may be perplexing. Is it one of those letters that ministers' offices commonly send, by which they politely fob off an importunate citizen saying that they have paid very close attention to a message that they won't take the slightest account of? Or is it, on the contrary, the hint of a change in policy?

This time, however, there is a true problem, as our contemporaries say. Let's call it a paradox, even an incongruity. To realise this, you should reread the words that ACDN's president sent to Madame Parly, in particular their conclusion:

"You are, Madame la ministre, a fine example of French double language, duplicity, hypocrisy and cynicism concerning respect for international humanitarian law, as also in disarmament matters, conventional or nuclear. There is nothing there to be proud of. As citizens we are ashamed of that France.

In the 'after-world' we are entering, Madame, the government you belong to needs to urgently change its discourse and its posture, put France's defense in line with with her commitments, her Constitution, her republican values, and simply in line with reason.

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'This is not a prayer, it is an order that must rise from the peoples to the governments, the order to choose between hell and reason' (Albert Camus, Combat, 8 August 1945)"

So those are the words for which the President of the Republic thanks their author and to which he draws her defense minister's attention, doubtless so that she will reply. "Double language, duplicity, hypocrisy and cynicism": how can the President accept those reproaches without flinching? Is he unaware that he inspires "our nation's defense policy"? So now it should be not up to him but just to his minister, who shortly will be alone in charge? Would he disavow her?

We will see how Madame Parly gets rid of this sticky situation. To whom will she now pass the hot potato? To the minister of foreign affairs? To the minister's office boy?

Meantime, we can always hold the crazy hope that France will soon initiate a radical revision of her defense policy. That the President will decide, for example, to invite the other nuclear-armed states to negotiate with France the concerted elimination of their arsenals. Or else, why not, that he will decide on his own authority to put to the French citizenry the question that ACDN wants to see put (for lack of a simpler procedure) by a shared-initiative referendum - parliament and citizens:

"Are you in favour of France participating in the abolition of nuclear and radioactive weapons and engaging with all the other states concerned in negotiations aimed at drawing up, ratifying and implementing a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear and radioactive weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective?"

If that still does not happen, recourse to stronger initiatives will doubtless be needed.

Saintes, 22 September 2020

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