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According to a poll conducted by IFOP

Three French Citizens out of Four want to Abolish Nuclear Weapons

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They want France to negotiate and ratify a treaty banning and eliminating nuclear weapons.

They say they are ready to support a bill organising a referendum on this question.

1. The poll and its results

« Do you want France to negotiate and ratify with all the states concerned a treaty to ban and completely eliminate nuclear weapons, under mutual and international control that is strict and effective? »

That was the first of the two questions in an IFOP poll on 7-9 October 2015, at the request of ACDN (Action des Citoyens pour le Désarmement Nucléaire), through a self-administered online questionnaire.

The survey was done with a sample of 1000 people representative of French citizens aged 18 and over. Its representativity was guaranteed by the method of quotas (sex, age, profession of the person asked) after stratification by region and category of town.

Taking into account all ages, categories and "political proximities", 74% of those surveyed answered YES, 26% NO. The margin of error was 2.8, meaning that YES lies between 71.2% and 76.8%.

Earlier polls had already indicated that a strong majority of French people were favourable to general nuclear disarmament including France - despite the alleged "national consensus" regarding the "nuclear strike force" (the so-called "deterrent") constantly mentioned by its supporters.

Thus a poll taken in March 2012 by IFOP for *Planète Paix*, *Témoignage chrétien* and *l'Humanité*, had found, two months before the presidential election, that 81 % of the French were favourable (32% very, 49% rather favourable) to France "committing to a process for an international convention for the total and controlled elimination of atomic weapons, through the United Nations".

This time, however, those polled were not asked to choose or reject an opinion "very", "rather favourable", "rather against", and "not at all", nor to formulate a wish that didn't implicate them personally: they were asked to express their wish YES or NO, exactly as if they were in a booth and were replying to a referendum question.

This was after they were reminded that the nuclear-armed states, including France, are flouting their international obligations in this matter:

« Q1- According to the UN, « every state that uses nuclear or thermonuclear arms must be deemed to be violating the UN Charter, acting in contempt of the laws of Humanity and committing a crime against Humanity and Civilization" (Resolution 1653 XVI of 24 November 1961). According to the Non-Proliferation Treaty ratified by France in 1992, the states possessing nuclear weapons are required to negotiate the complete elimination of these weapons, and all states must renounce them definitively. According to the International Court of Justice in its unanimous advisory opinion of 8 July 1996, "There exists an obligation to pursue in good faith and bring to conclusion negotiations leading to nuclear disarmament in all its aspects, under strict and effective international control." But the states concerned have so far never met to negotiate. This therefore prompts the question:

« Do you want France to negotiate and ratify with all the states concerned a treaty... »

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Those polled could not fail to see that if their answers gave a majority to YES that would imply a change in France's policies; and that if they produced a majority of NO, that would mean maintaining the *status quo*.

The second question further reinforced the feeling of being implicated personally and politically. It was introduced and formulated thus:

« Q2- According to France's Constitution, for the organizing of a referendum originating in Parliament a bill needs to be introduced by at least 20% of the parliamentary body (i.e. 185 MPs or senators out of 925) and then it needs to gain within nine months the support of at least 10% of enrolled voters, as transmitted either by electronic means or by papers lodged at town halls.

Do you think you would support a bill to organize a referendum on the question which you have just answered? »

Since the practical conditions for support have been made explicit, one might have expected YES answers from only a low proportion of those polled. In fact there too the result was 74% support for a referendum on the preceding question - 74% saying they were ready to support a bill to organize one - with 27% saying "certainly" and 47% "probably".

Such a result prompts the thought that those polled gave considered responses - something that is facilitated by a self-administered poll, unlike a phone survey where the answers have to be given quickly. It testifies not only to a deep desire among French people to be consulted, on this major question as on others, and says also that they are willing to "lend a hand" and "pay a cost" so that a referendum initiated in parliament becomes a referendum "by shared initiative" - and really does take place.

One might reasonably presume - as did apparently the designers of the constitutional reform of 23 July 2008, who multiplied the obstacles to a referendum not originating from presidential or government initiative - that requiring the support of 10% of the electorate (currently about 4.6 million citizens) was placing the bar so high that it would be unattainable. This poll seems to prove the opposite.

2. The lessons of the poll

Despite the traditional reservations one may have about polls, some political lessons can be drawn from this one:

1. The clear majority of French people - three out of four - oppose France's current policy on nuclear disarmament. Even though President Hollande announced in the 40th and last proposition of his electoral programme that he would maintain both the airborne and submarine components of the French "deterrent force", even though since his election he has gone further than all his predecessors in proclaiming in a loud voice that France's nuclear weapons should not only be kept but also "modernized"; even though his successive governments, budget after budget, have assigned handsome sums to this modernization, it was certainly not this policy that won him the election over Sarkozy, who was proposing exactly the same policy. The current military-nuclear policy carried out in the name of France is diametrically opposite to the will of the nation, though French citizens are at present condemned to be silent.

2. The desire to abolish nuclear weapons is widely shared by all those polled, irrespective of their "proximity" to particular political currents. In analysis of the poll, this proximity is measured by votes in the last elections, which they declare in the knowledge that anonymity is fully preserved (by a series of technical and judicial means).

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It is true that the more those polled vote for the left, the more they tend to want to commit France to a nuclear ban treaty. This is true of 89 % of those who voted for Jean-Luc Mélenchon - who had actually told ACDN he would organize a referendum on this question if elected.

Nonetheless, nearly two-thirds of those who voted Marine Le Pen - 63 % - in the first round of the 2012 election expressed the same wish, and 68% of the voters on the right and extreme right (UDI, Républicains, Front National) expressed this view, in this sample weighted by the electoral results, as against 84% for voters for the left (FDG, PS, EELV). That 16 % gap between "right" and "left" is significant, but is not sufficient to invalidate the idea that the French people, if consulted, would be in broad agreement to send diplomats to the negotiating table - with a mandate to achieve results: right up to the ratification of a universal treaty.

3. This clearly expressed majority targets, just as clearly, the abolition of nuclear weapons. Nothing less. The treaty to be negotiated must not just aim for a ban, which would admittedly have an important symbolic value but might have no practical effect (especially if the treaty is drafted, signed and ratified only by the non-nuclear states!) It must target also and organize concretely their effective elimination, complete, universal and duly controlled..

The control must be strict and effective, as the International Court pointed out in 1996. But to achieve this it must be not only international, it must also be mutual. Some of the bilateral Russo-American treaties have done this (START et SALT) and proved effective. We cannot rely on some UN agency such as the IAEA (International Atomic Energy Agency). It is well known that the IAEA inspections failed to stop North Korea from making atomic bombs by using military-quality plutonium produced by a "research reactor". That reactor was acquired through a "peaceful use" of atomic technology, encouraged by IAEA and by article IV of the Non-Proliferation Treaty which promotes nuclear energy "for civilian and peaceful purposes". So we should follow the adage that applies to bilateral disarmament processes: 'Trust... and Verify!' The monitoring can indeed be international, but must also be bilateral and multilateral, i.e, mutual. The people polled by IFOP seem to have understood that.

It goes without saying that if the question had concerned unilateral disarmament by France the results would have probably been very different. To give up 300 French nuclear warheads capable of causing nearly a billion deaths would be good in itself, and would probably be better for our own security (not to mention our economy) than keeping them. We can always consider this option if multilateral negotiations were to fail. But France's bombs represent barely 1.5% of the existing destructive power. Let's not look at the wrong question or the wrong objective. The urgency is not to set an example for the rest of the planet, but to induce all the world's people to ward off the worst threat to our common survival. Judging by their answers, those polled seem to have been aware of this.

4. This awareness progresses with age. Only 58% of those aged 18-24 want a ban treaty. It's only between 25 and 34, around age thirty, that the percentage reaches 67%. Between 35 and 49 the average reaches 75%, to culminate in 81% for those over 65. The answers to question two follow a similar pattern. It appears that experience - notably living through the Cold War - along with information and reflections deepening with age, plead in favour of the abolition of nuclear weapons.

A gap, albeit smaller, separates men and women. But it is not the same with both questions. 72% of men want abolition; 75% of women. But 79% of men are ready to support a referendum proposal (32% "certainly") as against only 70% of women (22% "certainly"). This is a gap of a third between women and men 22% of women certainly as against 32% of men - even though women are slightly more favourable to the question put. Did they think that their "double workday" did not give them the leisure to support the referendum (by going on the Internet or to the town hall)" This tends to support the idea that those polled, men or women, understood well that it was a matter of concrete support.

We note also that at least 7% of the men (79-72) and even more (since the YES voters are not necessarily adept at

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personal support) - would support the referendum proposal while preparing to vote NO to the question. Only a qualitative survey of them would be able to tease out all the motivations. But one would not be surprised to learn that the NO voters who want a referendum which they will lose are, in reality, victims of government brainwashing about French people supporting French nuclear policy. Or perhaps they have the democratic notion that the people ought to be consulted on questions of this importance, even if the consultation might produce an outcome they don't like. (That was the motivation of ACDN in 1996, when its founders wrote into its constitution the recourse to a referendum on this question. They were then completely unaware of the state of public opinion.)

5. If we accept that this representative sample of French people over 18 resembles the electorate as a whole, then the support of 10% of enrolled voters is realizable within the requisite nine months, with 27% potential volunteers and 47% "reservists". That is the most important and most unexpected lesson of this poll.

The first task of abolitionists is then to convince at least 185 MPs or senators to lodge a referendum bill using the question in this poll. For that they would need to get together and to besiege their national elected reps. Then, if this was not achieved before the presidential and parliamentary elections of 2017 they should make this referendum one of the top-priority questions of the election campaign, one of those that no candidate can avoid, knowing that it will weigh heavily in people's voting.

Parallel with this campaign, and without delay, a campaign needs to be begun within the socialist MPs. Namely, since the reform of 2008, article 11 of the Constitution states that "if the bill has not been examined by both houses within a timeframe set by the organic law, the President submits it to referendum". The timeframe set by the organic law of 6 December 2013 is six months. So, within this time if the Parliament places on its agenda the bill after it has gained the support needed and if the majority of both houses reject it, that is enough for it to be annulled even before being put to the people. But the Socialist Party put in its 2012 programme this commitment: " We will modify the law so that Parliament cannot block all referendum bills supported by 20% of parliamentarians and 10% of voters"... Now, the party needs to keep this commitment before the elections of 2017.

Conclusion

France's military-political policy makes her citizens unwilling accomplices in the preparing crimes against humanity, and in their possible committing by one man: the President of the Republic, who has the monstrous power to condemn and execute immediately, without trial or appeal, millions of people on the other side of the world.

This policy also makes France's people potential victims of a mutual massacre, by allowing other states' weapons to continue and by encouraging proliferation. It perpetuates a system of terror incapable of ending ordinary terrorism or of preventing the possibility of terrorism becoming nuclear.

It is radically contrary to humanitarian law, to France's international commitments, and consequently to the French Constitution which makes respect for human rights the very heart of the Republic and which confers on the President the duty of respecting treaties. It therefore flouts human life, international law, the French Constitution, and commonsense and democracy. Despite all that, the policy has continued for decades without the French people ever being consulted.

The people, not given the right of a citizens-initiated referendum, nevertheless have a means of getting rid of this policy: the so-called "referendum by shared initiative". Three-quarters of them are in favour of using it. They can. They need to. Furthermore, the MPs and senators owe it to them.