



a pedagogy by the example of "MILITARY LAICITY".

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L'Armée de Terre dans la société

Even though every French person may have a subjective interpretation of secularism, yet there is a fundamental and legal meaning that requires special effort... of pedagogy in an international context very sensitive to religious issues.

Dispelling misunderstandings has become a major strategic issue in a world where religious and non-religious convictions motivate an increasing number of violent actions (questions of blasphemy (1), apostasy, freedom of missionary action or the expression of atheism). This dimension is today imposing itself in the human environment of our theatres of operation, in the very heart of our military coalitions (2) and in our diplomatic relations (3).

Former naval officer, philosopher and academician Michel Serres says that in the late 1960s, when he wanted to interest students, he would talk to them about politics and, to make them laugh, he would talk to them about religion. Today, he notes that it is exactly the opposite. There is no doubt that religion has once again become a major topic of interest in most countries of the world.

The idea for this document was born out of a threefold observation made by several defence attachés noting that their local interlocutors :

- consider secularism as a French singularity;
- associate "French-style" secularism with hostility towards any public affirmation of religious identity;
- noted that each French person questioned about secularism gave a very personal definition of it.

It is important to respond to this caricatured perception, because the image of a France

"hostile to religions" often generates negative feelings towards our country. In this communication effort, it would be advisable not to overestimate the singularity of the French model of secularism and to avoid presenting it as a dogma that it is not.

To explain "what secularism is not", the example of its practice in the defence institution seems particularly useful. This "military secularism" (4) illustrates that the Republic is in no way hostile to the public expression of religious feelings. In order to guarantee freedom of religious practice in the particularly constraining environment of the armies, the State has been employing military chaplains of four faiths - Catholic, Jewish, Protestant since 1874 and Muslim (5) since 2005.

The Republic guarantees respect for freedom of thought, conscience and religion. This implies equality of treatment between non-believers and believers, but also a duty for the public authorities to enable everyone to live their faith peacefully.

As Emmanuel Macron reminded the French Council of Muslim Worship on 20 June 2017: "This is why the State has encouraged and supported the structuring of Muslim chaplaincies within our armed forces [since 2005], in prisons and hospitals. Then, turning to the former head of the Jewish military chaplaincy, Chief Rabbi Haïm Korsia, the President of the Republic continues: "The Army Chaplaincy in particular, dear Haïm, is exemplary in terms of training, communication and dialogue with other religions.

This living together is a concrete experience within our armies. It is the brotherhood of arms with values of tolerance and respect that unite in the same cause, the defence of France. The Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General François Lecointre, said in an interview given to the newspaper Les Echos (8 October 2017): "The army is a matrix of transformation. It is the only place where French society can be found in all its diversity".

The exemplary nature of the secularism experienced within the military institution deserves to be highlighted and valued in the international framework in which you work .

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(1) See the study on the regime applicable to the repression of blasphemy in France and in five countries (Iran, Ireland, Italy, Portugal and Turkey) published in January 2016 by the Senate; www.senat.fr/lc/lc262/lc262g.html#toc665.

(2) See the conference "The new challenges of military chaplaincy in NATO countries", organised in Paris by the Ministry of Defence on 10 October 2012, which provided a space for dialogue for military religious actors from NATO member countries. The transcripts of the conference speeches are available on the DGRIS intradef website.

(3) In October 2016, the DGRIS launched an Observatory with the CNRS (French National Centre for Scientific Research) devoted to the geopolitical challenges posed by religion. The productions of this observatory are online on the DGRIS website.

(4) Expression used by the Chief of Staff of the Armed Forces, General Jean-Louis Georgelin, at the reception given on 9 November 2009 in honour of Mgr Patrick Le Gal, in the presence of the four chaplaincies.

(5) Our approximately three hundred military chaplains (including reservist and part-time positions) are divided into four chaplaincies: Catholic, Jewish, Protestant and Muslim. The insignia of their faith (see p. 31) is embroidered on the shoulder sleeves of their uniforms. Ten to twelve chaplains accompany the projected forces on external operations. Since 2015, chaplains have been receiving three-week initial training at the École des commissaires des armées de Salon-de-Provence.

This example owes much to the support of the Ministry of the Armed Forces and it should serve as an example to other associations and administrations concerned".

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