



DEFENCE: PREPARING FOR THE FUTURE

NATIONAL ASSEMBLY REPORT N° 1055

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Autres thèmes

@ National Assembly

I. THE DIFFICULT ASSESSMENT OF THE DEFENCE MISSION

The present report evaluating the implementation of the 2017 appropriations for the defence mission is in line with the desire of the National Assembly's Finance Committee to strengthen the evaluation of public policies during the examination of the settlement law. This virtuous approach, which the Special Rapporteur has been calling for many years, has resulted in the hearing of each minister on their ministry's 2017 assessment.

Introductory remarks :

This voluntarist approach at the initiative of the finance commission imposes two conditions for its full success:

- that all Members of Parliament take up the evaluation of public policies, which should not be the sole responsibility of the Finance Committee;
- that the executive accepts to be evaluated by a body other than itself.

On this last point, the exercise carried out on the 2017 accounts marks a disappointment as far as the defence mission is concerned. Despite an anticipation of the schedule of hearings by the Special Rapporteur, the Ministry of the Armed Forces showed little readiness to provide the information needed for a substantiated assessment.

On 9 April 2017, a 65-question questionnaire was sent to the Ministry of the Armed Forces

on the 2017 budget implementation. On 20 April 2017, the annual performance report of the defence mission was sent to Parliament electronically. At the beginning of May, the programme of ministerial hearings by the Finance Committee was drawn up for the spring evaluation, the hearing of the Minister of the Armed Forces having been set for 4 June at 4 p.m.

On¹ June 2017, 31 replies were sent to the Special Rapporteur. On the day of the Minister's hearing on 4 June, 5 replies with the words "restricted circulation" and one reply "defence confidential" were submitted to the Special Rapporteur. 11 a.m.; 19 replies and one "restricted circulation" reply were transmitted at 1.45 p.m.; a partial "restricted circulation" reply was transmitted at 3.45 p.m. 8 were unanswered at the Minister's hearing.

The following questions :

N° Text of the question

- 2 Present by title and by program the AEs and CPs consumed in the context of the defence mission in 2017, justifying the discrepancies noted with the AEs and CPs recorded in the BIA
- 14 Establish the amount of savings generated by factor costs in 2017, specifying the main factors generating savings and those generating additional costs. Indicate the destination of these savings
- 16 Present by title (2, 3, 4, 5, 6 and 7) the RAs and NLAs executed under Program 144 in fiscal year 2017, justifying the variances with the RAs and NLAs recorded in the BIA.
- 28 Document and analyse the performance indicators of the DRM and DPSD for the 2017 financial year
- 38 Present by title (2, 3, 4, 5, 6, and 7) the EI and NOCs executed under the 146 program in fiscal year 2017, justifying the variances with the EI and NOCs recorded in the BIA.
- 47a Provide a sheet for each piece of equipment mentioned in the appendix, specifying the following data as at 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017: For equipment in service : equipment within the forces, OPEX commitment, RETEX OPEX, date of entry into service, average age, foreseeable date of withdrawal from service, availability rate, concept of employment, acquisition cost, maintenance cost, cost of ownership, infrastructure cost, etc.
- 54 Specify the follow-up to the information report on strategic transport presented by the National Assembly Finance Committee on 28 March 2017. Indicate the measures taken by the CSOA to optimize the use of the various strategic transport chartering contracts.
- 55 Indicate the recommendations made by the General Control of the Armed Forces on strategic transport in January 2018 and the organizational and individual decisions taken as a result.
- 56 Transmit the notes, reports and any other document relating to strategic transport conducted by the cabinet and departments of the Minister of Defence before March 2017 and as mentioned by the Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs in his right of reply published on the France Inter website on 10 March 2018. Transmit the certificate also mentioned in this right of reply relating to the destination of the Singaporean account of the company ICS.

The core of the evaluation of the 2017 implementation of defence appropriations concerns the analysis of the differences observed between the appropriations entered in the initial finance act and those actually consumed. Whether for

the Defence mission as a whole or for the two programmes within the scope of the Special Rapporteur's remit, the Ministry of the Armed Forces did not follow up on the questions. **Reading the annual performance report alone does not shed any light on the quality of public spending for the nation as a whole, and through it for the nation.**

Some of the replies received show a certain casualness on the part of the Ministry of the Armed Forces.

Thus, the Special Rapporteur is repeatedly asked to refer to the Court of Auditors' note analysing budget execution. However, the Court of Auditors is by no means the Government's spokesman on budgetary matters. The same applies to the capacity consequences of the cancellation of €850 million in equipment credits on 20 July 2017.

Similarly, the **misuse of the "restricted distribution" classification, without any legal basis, leads to ubuesque situations: Question No. 1** was addressed to the Ministry of the Armed Forces in the following terms: Question No. 1 was addressed to the Ministry of the Armed Forces in the following terms: "to take stock of the activity of the Ministry of the Armed Forces in 2017. For each of the external and internal operations, specify the numbers of personnel and equipment involved and the main highlights. For each of the armies, the SGA, the SEA, the SSA and the DGA, present the performance indicators related to their activities and operational capabilities, the FTEs as at 31 December 2016 and 31 December 2017, while justifying the discrepancies noted with the BIA for 2017". The response transmitted is accompanied by the words "restricted circulation ", which does not allow the Special Rapporteur to report on it. The **defence appropriations are therefore part of a reality that the Ministry of the Armed Forces does not wish to see published.**

This situation is all the more absurd in that most of the "classified" reply elements turn out to be a simple copy and paste of texts published in the 2017 annual performance report which anyone can find on the internet at the following address: https://www.performancepublique.budget.gouv.fr/sites/performance_publique/files/farandole/ressources/2017/rap/pdf/RAP2017_BG_Defense.pdf.

This reveals the low regard in which the Ministry of the Armed Forces holds parliamentary control.

With regard to the availability of equipment, since 2013, the Special Rapporteur has endeavoured to question the Ministry of Defence annually by means of written questions, supplemented if necessary by budgetary questions. These questions aim to provide information by equipment and not by equipment families as proposed in the annual performance reports. For example, it is not relevant to have an average rate of availability of attack helicopters, whereas the Indeed, for example, it is not relevant to have an average rate of availability of attack helicopters when the army's light aviation fleet is divided between the venerable and rustic Gazelle and the recent and sophisticated Tiger. The lack of response to question No. 47a echoes the lack of response to the written questions posed by the Special Rapporteur in early January 2018 on availability in 2017.

Thus, while by the same date in 2017 the Special Rapporteur had most of the elements available, these were missing in 2018. Moreover, the doctrine of classification of responses changes from year to year. For example, for submarines and, henceforth, for air surveillance and anti-air defence systems, the Ministry of the Armed Forces tends to no longer publish data under cover of information sensitivity, whereas this information was accessible in previous years. Such reversals are inexplicable.

In the end, the **information provided to Parliament by the Ministry of the Armed Forces is tending to dwindle, undermining Parliament's capacity to control and evaluate public policies, a mission that is recognised by Article 24 of the Constitution.**

Consequently, the following developments have emerged from the analysis of the annual performance report and from the personal work of the Special Rapporteur. Late and piecemeal ministerial responses were exploited as best they could, not allowing this evaluation report to provide accurate and exhaustive information to citizens who are also taxpayers .

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