**NEW YEAR’S GREETINGS TO THE ARMED FORCES FROM AIR BASE 118 IN MONT-DE-MARSAN**

Mont-de-Marsan – Friday, 20 January 2023

Minister of the Interior and Overseas France

Minister for the Armed Forces,

Minister Delegate, dear Geneviève Darrieussecq,

Ministers of State,

Chair of the Foreign Affairs, Defence and Armed Forces Committee of the Senate,

Chair of the Defence Committee of the National Assembly,

Senators,

National Assembly Deputies,

Members of the European Parliament,

Elected representatives,

Regional Prefect,

Prefect,

Armed Forces Chief of Staff,

Delegate-General of Armament,

Secretary-General for Administration,

Chiefs of Staff,

Director-General of the National Gendarmerie,

General officers,

Colonel,

Officers, NCOs, soldiers, sailors, aviators and civilian personnel of the armed forces,

Ladies and gentlemen,

At the beginning of each year, it is an established tradition, whatever the situation or the crises of the day, to dedicate some time to our armed forces. I am pleased to be doing so this year at the imposing Air Force base in Mont-de-Marsan. As is often the case at such events, it is an opportunity to take stock of the past year, to pay tribute to the efforts and sacrifices of our service members around the world, and to sketch out the coming year, identifying various key points.

These regular meetings enable me to say how much trust the Nation places in you, and how grateful we are for your selflessness; the commitment of those who support you; the courage shown by our wounded and the energy of those who care for them; and the resilience and dedication of your families. For me, it is always represents an opportunity to stand by your side, beyond the formality of military ceremonies. But today is no doubt a rather unique occasion, as I am also here to talk to you about the future. The future of our armed forces.

In Toulon, two months ago, I presented the vision for our country set forth in the National Strategic Review. Here in your presence, I would now like to discuss how this vision needs to come to fruition through the Military Programming Bill that will soon be submitted to Parliament. To start with, I would like to highlight how exceptional this exercise was. Firstly because for the first time in decades, the act that came before it was implemented in its entirety, thanks to the efforts of all the ministries and Parliament, and I would like to thank them for that. Secondly, it was exceptional because of the thought process and discussions that went into it, involving the energy and intelligence of many people and you – all of you – were involved in it. I will come back to this.

But my words today are addressed as much to you as to the Nation as a whole. Firstly, because the Military Programming Act represents the country’s efforts in support of its armed forces. And these efforts will be proportionate to the dangers that will arise in the coming years, which means they will be considerable, especially as this Military Programming Act – its instruments and its very architecture – require a unanimous effort.

The Military Programming Act is the collective path we are going to take together. It is the ultimate strategic act, one which – based on an analysis of our forces, our specificities, threats and vulnerabilities – sets forth choices that represent a decades-long commitment. What guided the first of these acts, at the beginning of our Republic, after strange defeats and unexpected mishaps – what guided their deployment, their revision, their choices, was a simple idea: never being a war behind, never seeking to intellectually win the previous conflict, but rather ensuring the country is ready for the one that may come next. We must therefore always be a war ahead. This brings us back to that imperative: this Military Programming Bill must draw on the conclusions that our era has brought us, bearing in mind the surprises of history that cannot be predicted. And I would like today to reassure all of you, our forces, all of our people: that in the face of changing wars, France has and will have armies ready for the century’s perils.

As described by the National Strategic Review, the threats are multiple and overlap, rather than succeed one another. Firstly, there are high-intensity conflicts in Europe, with heightened desires for power playing out against the backdrop of a multilateral system in crisis. There are no more peace dividends due to Russia’s war of aggression against Ukraine. And we are seeing the brutal costs of today’s violence. In Europe, Asia and the Indo-Pacific, the international order is giving way to a state of nature in a form not seen in decades. The Eastern Mediterranean, the straits of the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the area around Taiwan, among others, are the theatres of regular tensions. Our overseas communities find themselves increasingly exposed in this situation. And every sphere, including the Internet, social media and the intangible information space, is now subject to conflict. At the same time, global shifts are giving rise to new threats, including threats involving the climate, energy and technology, with the risks of destabilization that such upheavals can bring. Lastly, there are “background” risks, long-standing ones, those of terrorist attacks and jihadist violence which, while diminished, have not disappeared.

What characterizes this decade is this accumulation of threats of all types and in all regions: a sort of anthology of war risks that have tempted many generations before us: unbridled imperialism, nuclear proliferation and terrorist violence. Some wars that are very old, others unprecedented, but they all add up and can feed into one another.

These forms of conflict, however, are taking on a new shape, often veering between sophistication and a brutal simplicity. Sophistication in the form of a technological race that ranges from cyber to quantum computing, with artificial intelligence in the near future. And almost naked brutality, especially in Ukraine, with a repeat of scenes that we thought were consigned to the history books along with Verdun and the Somme. Global rearmament is therefore taking place at both ends of a polarized spectrum. On one side you have cutting-edge technology and on the other, the most rudimentary means - which can pose a major challenge to a powerful, well-equipped army that is vulnerable both above and below its field of action. It would be a trap to focus all our efforts on technological sophistication; it would also be a mistake to invest only in these new technologies. These new conflicts, despite the excellent quality of our intelligence, are more diffuse, quietly eroding an already fragile international order. The world’s violence has not lost its ability to surprise. Equally, the operations of tomorrow will not be large-scale repetitions of prepared exercises.

We therefore need to focus on agility and a swift response, rather than on the intellectual purity of an abstract model, as we will not be able to choose the conflicts that we must face. And what characterizes the new conflicts of this century is the blurring of lines between open and explicit fighting and repeated, systemic and pernicious malice. War is no longer declared; it is background noise, insidious and hybrid. The targeting of civilian infrastructure critical to the nation is our common plight – I am thinking of things like cyber attacks. And because our armed forces are made up of men and women who live in a society that is itself changing, we must draw all the necessary conclusions and be sure to remain constantly mobilized and vigilant and ensure our society’s resilience.

Lastly, we must never forget that our Nation is an archipelago. And while you safeguard the security of our mainland, we must never lose sight of our overseas communities, where we must maintain our presence. Global events are placing many of these territories, particularly in the Pacific and the Indian Ocean, on the front lines of possible future confrontations .

It makes sense for us to deduce the risks posed by this panorama of perils and to determine avenues for action. We need to predict and anticipate, to prepare for the world ahead, even if habits and known equipment and approaches can sometimes be overturned. We need to enter the drone age, invest in quantum computing, and cease believing in human intelligence alone, even if it is and will remain essential. But we must add to it, multiply it using artificial intelligence. Lastly, we need to reassure the Nation and its people, to ensure we have the necessary moral fortitude.

The 2019-2025 Military Programming Act had a clear aim: repairing our armed forces, giving them breathing room and resources, ending shortages and regaining leverage to take action. Thanks to your collective work and the vigilance of your leaders, this effort is moving forward, thanks too to the fact that all these commitments have been fulfilled down to the last euro. But the work must continue. In the course of my many visits to the troops, I have realized how much difference this fundamental work has made and achieved, both tangibly and in terms of morale.

The new Military Programming Bill aims to continue and amplify this effort to restore our armed forces. And ultimately, after repairing the armed forces, we are going to transform them. We need to buy the time that separates us from tomorrow’s conflict. Yes, the Nation has to transform its armed forces, while naturally maintaining its strategic constants, building on the excellence and devotion of its service members. But we must also, as a Nation, transform ourselves, be ready for wars that are more brutal, more numerous and more ambiguous, as I just mentioned.

This is the ambitious aim of the Military Programming Bill. Significant resources are needed to achieve this aim. While the 2019-2024 Military Programming Act established a budget of €295 billion, I can tell you today that I will ask Parliament to earmark €400 billion in budget funding over the 2024-2030 period. This would cover a total of €413 billion in military needs and thereby renew this valuable military apparatus, which helps ensure our freedom, our security, our prosperity and our standing in the world.

In total, these two Military Programming Acts will double our armed forces’ budgets. I strongly believe that these considerable funds are needed to scale up our defence effort which has been especially robust compared with the last five decades. These unprecedented resources imply huge efforts. Yet it is the price we must pay for the security of our children, to maintain our standing in the world, to defend our values, to continue our long story of glory and freedom for which we need to write the future chapters. We must take this essential step to build our armed forces of the future, although it is only a first step.

Because this €413 billion alone is not enough to reshape our armed forces for the century that has just begun. But it is the start of an unprecedented investment and a deep change that will be irreversible. We should not simply do the same with more, but do better and differently. Because the world will not wait for us, because rivalries whet appetites and stimulate strategies, because we must maintain our position in the world.

We are facing many future challenges, the first being to continue defending our interests, which have not varied: namely, the defence of our national territory, and particularly our overseas territories and our citizens. Others challenges include ensuring the security of our immediate neighbourhood, from the Mediterranean to the Balkans, from the Middle East to Africa, and of course fighting climate change, consistently and continuously.

Still another challenge is adapting to today’s demands for a robust and credible nuclear deterrent, and defending our interests wherever new forms of conflict and lawlessness are seen, as new ways are emerge, sometimes insidiously, to challenge a free, safe and sustainable future for all.

This means finding new ways to develop our partnerships and our alliances, while remaining a leader in Europe and a reliable NATO ally. This means capitalizing on the exceptional relationship we have built with such countries as Greece, Egypt, the United Arab Emirates and India.

This means continuing to deepen structural partnerships, including those with Germany – and on Sunday I will have an opportunity to discuss this further with Federal Chancellor Scholz at our traditional French-German Defence and Security Council. And with the United Kingdom, since we will be holding our bilateral summit in a few weeks Prime Minister Sunak. And with Italy and Spain, with which have also just signed a Treaty of Cooperation and Friendship renewing the framework for our defence relations, which dated back to the 1980s.

Lastly, this means enabling France to build and lead a high-level coalition with its partners to defend the interests of Europe or of its allies, if the circumstances so require. This is a responsibility that it alone in continental Europe would be able to assume and we must have the means to do so. That is why, at my request, the Armed Forces Chief of Staff proposed a change in our army model which focuses on coherence over size, and responsiveness without compromising endurance.

First of all, this means consolidating the core of our sovereignty, while the model of the previous Military Programming Act focused on expeditionary capacity and counter-terrorism. It is important to strengthen our deterrence by providing all the necessary means to ensure that it remains robust and reliable, and to modernize it in the particular and changing conditions of the world today. Deterrence is what makes France different from other European countries. We all recognize its vital importance once again, in looking at the war in Ukraine. It warrants the considerable efforts that we are dedicating to it, in terms of technology and whatever is required. It raises the quality of all our armed forces. At a time when deterrence has perhaps never seemed so necessary, we must strongly defend it. This also means explaining it better to those who are questioning it.

Our essential sovereignty also requires stronger permanent postures. This means greater intelligence capabilities that help us anticipate crises and threats. I have constantly stressed the need for France to have its own intelligence so that we are autonomous when it comes to our decisions and actions. As a result, we developed Operation Hamilton in 2018, among other operations in recent years. This Military Programming Bill will massively increase intelligence funds by nearly 60%, with the doubling of the budget of the Military Intelligence Directorate (DRM) and Defence Intelligence and Security Directorate (DRSD), greater surveillance capability incorporating drones, and the means to take action in our sovereign spaces, the means of interventing, particularly in our overseas departments and regions and our overseas communities, where the ability to provide an initial local response must be stepped up by the deployment of significant reinforcements.

This means mutual support among armed forces, domestic security forces and civil security forces so as to respond more and more effectively to health and climate-related crises, for example. Sovereignty also means the ability to resist; it means resilience and above all, cyber resilience. I want us to double our capability to address major cyber attacks. In the face of all possible threats to our society and the potential destabilization they could cause, the broader resilience of our society, its morale, as I already mentioned, and the ability of our nation to act in the face of an unexpected event, as it did during the pandemic, are essential. In this respect, I hope in time to double the reserves that will reinforce our active armed forces and scale up new reserve units, including territorial units and coast squadrons. In this respect, Universal National Service will ensure we have young people who will be prepared for any threat – I will have a chance to address this again in the weeks ahead.

Secondly, transformation entails going from a model designed to conduct operations in situations where our freedom to act was strong, to an ability to evolve in challenging environments, against battle-hardened adversaries, who are technologically skilled across a wide range of conflicts. This is what I call the move toward high intensity. We must be able to act more quickly and more responsively: by reinforcing national response capabilities and thereby providing the necessary means for an intervention on short notice, even if it is far from metropolitan France. And to do this, while increasing these capabilities and this responsiveness, we must also increase our ability to endure over time and to resist efforts and effects of attrition. It is therefore necessary to scale up operational preparation, improve the availability of equipment, adapt our alert levels to the intensity of the threat, and organize and build up our stocks of ammunition, our logistics, and our support. We will achieve this more effectively if we are capable of managing crises differently, by controlling the footprint and duration of our operations far from France. In this regard as well, we need to reinforce our special forces and provide them with the equipment they deserve, in other words the best, most adapted equipment that clearly makes the most of all the most advanced technology. But in the face of the strongest adversaries, we should also act with greater strength to achieve decisive military effects swiftly. That means toughening up our assets. We will therefore move to the sole use of the world-renowned Rafale aircraft. We will continue to resolutely update our land forces through accelerated digitization of the battlefield and a special investment in the new forms of cyber warfare. We will increase the power and the protection of our frigates and, of course, will develop new-generation aircraft carriers. We will also innovate by developing remotely guided munitions, broadening the use of drones and doubling our investments in them. Investing in quantum technology and artificial intelligence will also help to ensure our cyber security and improve our intelligence resources. We must toughen up our assets; these are just a few examples. The Minister for the Armed Forces will have an opportunity in the coming days and weeks to explain all of this in detail.

We will also need to toughen up operational support. The environmental elements of our forces. And we will also need to improve the balance between equipment, maintenance, ammunition, operational activities and logistical coherence, consolidate support services that have in the past been cut back too often, and strengthen our health services. This will require broad consolidation that is fully integrated into the appropriate format and contract.

We will also work to combine military effects through the digitization of the battlefield, particularly collaborative combat capabilities, such as the Scorpion land-based system and in the future, the Future Combat Air System (FCAS), among others, which we are launching along with German and Spain. We will increase our capabilities in areas with high operational added value and ground-to-air defence because even with deterrence, our national territory is not immune to isolated strikes due to disruptive actors, particularly non-state ones. That is why we will increase our capabilities in all areas of air defence by at least 50%; that of course includes anti-drone combat. Long-range strikes, the elimination of adverse air defences and of course anti-submarine warfare will be among these priorities. The third linchpin of this transformation involves shared spaces. But it is not necessarily through impacts and strikes that we will be tested or challenged in the future. Our adversaries may want to deploy a whole range of ambiguous actions, both direct and indirect, such as interference, actions for which responsibility is not claimed, perhaps also with faits accomplis, intimidation, malicious tactics to impede, curb, trap and perhaps blind us, without always entering into confrontation. We must be able to respond to these multiple actions on the far edges of our territories and on the fringes of the law. And we will therefore need to anticipate them by detecting weak signals, adopting an open, proactive approach that ranges from using our influence to taking direct action via military efforts, but also IT, digital technology, cultural, economic and industrial efforts. They must be efforts in which weapons play an important but not exclusive role.

To do so, we will step up our ability to monitor and react, but also to take the initiative, to send clear strategic messages in exoatmospheric space, the digital space and maritime spaces. We are continuing to increase our space capabilities by relying much more on New Space services, surveillance, communications and protection, and from now on they will be an even greater part of our key missions to make France a space power. We will further develop our means of action in the digital space, by providing resources to attract both civilian and military talent and by remaining at the forefront of innovation in this area, which is one of the most important areas for the future.

Finally, in the maritime space, we need naval capabilities which are commensurate with our country’s maritime assets. France has the world’s second-largest exclusive economic zone as a result of its overseas territories. This huge asset is also a huge responsibility, among other things, with regard to environmental and climate issues and the protection of certain infrastructures and our territories. I would also like us to obtain a good understanding of the deep seabed to a depth of 6,000 metres for military reasons and to protect our critical undersea infrastructure. Furthermore, I would like our armed forces to have a larger and better presence in our overseas territories and to represent a strategic constellation that is both a bridge and a lookout for our interests around the world. I will soon present the concrete and operational deployment of this overseas strategy. Finally, in connection with all of this, we must revamp our joint operations command, particularly in order to better combat hybrid strategies.

The final linchpin I would like to mention concerns international partnerships. Firstly, these partnerships can only be considered within our European framework. Our security depends on that of our neighbours, our partners with whom we share values and interests.

We are bound together not only by treaties, but also by a specific concept of the world, both to defend the territory of Europe and to spread the values of the EU27 beyond it. We must step up interoperability and, of course, our common strategic culture.

In recent years, we have made huge progress in this area: from forming a European Defence Fund with structured cooperation, to the European Intervention Initiative, to unprecedented operations such as Takuba, and hugely revolutionary bilateral partnerships such as the CaMo with Belgium. It is in this vein that we must continue. France will be able to meet all its responsibilities in Europe and beyond. If in the future a major partner were to look elsewhere, we must be capable of working with Europeans inside or outside NATO and, if necessary, to carry out the command capabilities enabling us to carry out a major operation together. For us, this would mean being able to deploy a joint capability of up to 20,000 troops. This gives you an idea of the extent of our challenges and our ambitions.

And will we also have to renew our other partnerships. In fact, I will soon discuss our links with Africa. But we will foster and intensify the exceptional partnerships which we have already led and which I referred to earlier. And with them, I hope, others will come, such as Indonesia, and we will have to explore how to develop new capacity-building cooperation, new interdependencies, and new forms of training and shared action. This is an extraordinary asset which I would like to develop. It takes on its full meaning for countries like ours which in the future do not want to be held hostage by major rivalries between third parties.

As you have seen, it is thus an entire programme of change which is being put forward. This Military Programming Bill will enable France to become an even more solid country as regards defending its sovereignty, better able to act in shared spaces, with the support of historical but also renewed partnerships, and where necessary, with the ability to train its allies in major operations and exert its influence. In short, it will become a country which is more sovereign, enterprising, agile and capable of taking the initiative.

This strategic update must allow us to bring ideas and budgets in line with dangers and threats. Only upon its completion will France be able to fully, confidently and freely exercise its vocation and heritage. This high ambition thus comes with a major requirement: ensuring that the necessary resources are in place. There is no luxury, pleasure or comfort in this project. Just the bare necessities. At a time when every euro of French taxpayers’ money counts, we had to find the best compromise between a defence which matches our ambitions and the essential principle of moderation. I believe we have struck the right balance.

I know and appreciate that this was a lot of work for the armed forces. Choices had to be made, targets adapted, updates staggered. And above all, the expectations are high. Expectations of the armed forces and the Directorate-General for Armament (DGA), which must work to shorten procurement cycles, speed up the request process, hugely reduce normative restrictions and develop an innovative approach to use – for genuine users – and I know how important that is to all of you, as once again our Ukrainian friends have so beautifully shown by their example. We can act much more quickly, much better and sometimes at a lower cost, if collectively we can bring together those who use and innovate.

These expectations also apply to the defence manufacturers who play a vital role, and I would like to thank them this morning, as they are vital to our sovereignty. And I must clearly stress, high standards of effectiveness and readiness must apply to these efforts by the State and the by entire Nation. Together, we must learn to embrace constant change. To work differently, to drastically cut production cycles, not to be overly complex as in other technological sectors, to more quickly adapt our equipment and production cycles to our partners’ needs and to the demands of a conflict. And to do all of this over the long term.

I also want to reduce the costs of procurement and maintaining operational readiness through a joint state-manufacturing effort. Last July, I spoke about a war economy. That is our shared future. But a war economy supported by such an investment from the Nation is not some kind of perpetual emergency prompting us to spend unwisely. It requires building the conditions for a more sustainable sovereignty where we spend more efficiently. Because the more clearly we express our needs, and the more staunchly we commit to adaptability, the better we can manage costs. We are providing a clear path forward for more than a decade, even.

This requires candour and high standards. The second requirement, after what I just said about resources, is to continue investing heavily in our people: our soldiers, sailors and aviators, civilian and military defence staff, to develop and maintain our skills, with loyalty as our highest priority. It is not a question of remuneration or pensions, although I am also monitoring those issues.

Loyalty is also achieved by the meaning given to one’s activities each day, the availability of materials, the variety of missions, the cohesion within units. And I also welcome the commitment of the army chiefs of staff who are closely monitoring these conditions, which are essential to the morale of our units. Loyalty is also based on our efforts to reduce the strains on your loved ones, and I am counting a lot on the second phase of the *Plan Famille*, as well as the *Plan Blessé* which is also essential, as I emphasized on 13 July before many of you here today, and I would like to thank the Minister and Minister of State for their work in this area.

The final requirement, of course, is implementation. Our greatest risk, in such an uncertain world, was for our resources to fall short of our ambition. That risk, as you can see, has been eliminated. But now, in concrete terms, we must lay the foundations to ensure our resources do indeed match our ambitions, in the area of ammunition, spare parts, and also more tangible areas, both in training and operations, for all of us. Implementation will be the core concern over the next few months and will be our utmost priority.

Ladies and gentlemen, in conclusion, I would like to thank all of you who contributed to this colossal project. I would like to thank the Minister for the Armed Forces, the Chief of Staff, the Delegate-General of Armament, all of the Ministry directors and staff. I know that hundreds of hours have been spent scrutinizing the model, challenging the figures, checking each line. On multiple occasions, I too have posed questions to the Minister and Chief of Staff, and I would like to thank all of you for your tremendous and swiftly-completed work.

I would also like to thank the members of parliament who were involved formulating the National Strategic Review, who have been working with the Minister for the Armed Forces over the past few months and who tomorrow, in their respective committees, will do the invaluable job of analysing, debating and improving this text. They will be able to focus on it even more keenly thanks to the committee chairpersons, who will facilitate the next development phase of our Military Programming Bill. The bill that will be submitted to Parliament is solid. Now is the time for courage. It is a coherent, robust project which takes into account the past and establishes our position for the future. A project of national sovereignty.

And this sovereignty would be neither ambitious nor coherent without its European dimension, which must be strongly developed in terms of military capabilities and, naturally, armed cooperation, but more generally, in terms of implementing the priorities of our strategic compass. Our sovereignty also relates to energy, technology and manufacturing, as well as the economy, finance and the budget. That is why in addition to the Programming Bill, it will require a series of acts and concrete initiatives to mobilize the entire Nation. Civil mobilization and military action are inseparable. We have learned this too from what we have seen over the past year in Ukraine, on European soil, in .

Lastly, it has a military dimension, so naturally this Programming Bill must enable us to build, to consolidate and to provide guarantees. I am counting on the wisdom of our Parliament to legislate and adopt a text by the summer so that the goals set forth in this future act can be met as soon as possible, as we know that we must move forward.

But I am also counting on you, soldiers, sailors, aviators, engineers, technicians, civilian and military service personnel from our directorates and our general staff. This Military Programming Bill is of course a programming exercise but it’s all about the implementation it, as I have said. You will benefit from it. This involves responsibility and I am counting on you and your leaders to make the changes it contains. I also know that I can count on you to fly our flag high and do justice to the French armed forces.

So for 2023 and for the years ahead, I wish you the levels of performance, excellence and courage that are needed so that together we can achieve our ambitions.

What underlies this ambition is the fortitude I spoke of on 13 July, the fortitude within yourselves, which I have seen each time I have met your comrades-in-arms as they depart for or return from operations. It remains with you each day, because it is the deepest purpose of our armed forces, and the most important. It is not a number, it will never be a piece of equipment, or a capability: it is a deep, existential choice, which you made by committing to serve France in our armed forces. This choice, and the way you honour it, the way you and your families inhabit it, is by far our greatest strength. And I want to tell you here today, it is my greatest source of pride.

I am infinitely grateful to you for it and I urge you to never ever give up on it. Tomorrow’s army will be different to today’s. But what will remain unchanged is our respect for you all, the recognition of the entire Nation, the trust of the Nation. And I wanted to emphasize that to you today. I am proud of you and grateful for what you do.

Long live the Republic! Long live France!