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French COMETA Report

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Subject: French COMETA Report

The COMETA Report

We announced in a recent press release the publication of a report which was to be an assessment of the French UFO situation by former junior officials from the french Institute for High Defence Studies (Institut des Hautes Etudes de Defence National - IHEDN). This report was published as a special issue of the weekly VSD and is said to have been distributed with a circulation of 70,000 copies throughout newstands in France, on July 17th.

Bernard Thouanel, editor of this issue of VSD 'Hors Serie' must be praised for his role in bringing the report to the public as it was first intended to circulate mainly within the official military or political spheres. As Bernard Thouanel seems to have decided to make no comment or statement on the report over the net, and that much has already been said, although with little informative value, by enthusiastic French ufologists, we have decided to bring to your attention an 'assessment of the assessment' so to speak, so that colleagues from abroad know where to stand with this report. The following only expresses views from the French group SOS OVNI.

Titled Les OVNI et la Defence (UFO's and Defence), the 90 page long issue is sub-titled A quoi doit-on se preparer ? (What should we prepare for ?). The issue, although published by 'VSD Hors Serie' is signed by the acronym 'COMETA', initials which are not explained through the text other than that they belong to a non-profit organization which one understands draws it's members from the Association of Former Junior Officials of the Institute for High Defence Studies.

The report is split into four very unequal parts titled :

1. Facts and testimony
2. An assessment of what we know
3. UFOs and Defence
4. Conclusion and proposals

It goes without saying that the report is unofficial since it is published by a private non-profit organization which only reflects the views of it's members. Confusion is nevertheless skillfully kept over whether the report should be considered official or not. In his introductory note for instance, General Bernard Norlain, former head of IHEDN says:

"I hope that the proposals from COMETA, inspired by good sense, will be examined and carried out by authorities from this country. The first report from the Association of former Junior Officials had helped create, within the French Space Center, the only civil office in the world dedicated to the study of UFOs.

May this new more complete assessment give a fresh impetus to our nation's efforts as well as to an essential international cooperation. The Institute for High Defence Studies would have then well served the country and even, maybe, the whole of humanity " .

The report was obviously prepared so that French political authorities may reconsider their position towards the study of unidentified aerial phenomena in general, and, more particularly, the funding of SEPRA (Service d'Expertise de Phenomenes de Rentree Atmospherique - Service for the Study of Reentry Phenomena) headed by Jean-Jacques Velasco. Unlike the first report in 1977, it's goals where not to sum up the current state of ufological affairs on a global scale, where private research would have been scanned. One then wonders on which basis cases where selected by and for the military. For instance, Lakenheath (1956), the RB-47 case (1957) or Teheran (1976) are mentionned while there is not a word on the Belgian sightings flap (1989-1991), a situation which has led to much speculation in France and Belgium.

Contrarily to what has been said, although members of COMETA may be considered couragous to have come forward, there has been no threat to their careers as most, if not all, are formerly from the military or from civil service.

But their assessment of the situation is more than questionable, at least in the last part of the report which, although unsigned, bears the marks of industry with close ties to the military and research facilities whose names have already been cited in relation with GEPAN's, then SEPRA's long history.

Unless these people have insider information, which would have yet to be revealed, their leaning toward the more paranoïd trends of ufology is more than alarming. They consider for instance Corso's assertions to be possibly reliable much as they do with Nick Pope's views. Roswell is taken for granted and North America is portrayed as the 'Big Black Wolf' who's debunking scheme, especially (but not only) over Roswell would seem logical if we are to believe they have aquired otherworldly objects. In one of the unsigned annexes, titled 'The Roswell Affair - Disinformation', one can read the following statement:

"It seems the crash at Roswell happened on the 4th of July, 'Independance Day', at around 11h30 pm. The date and place symbolise the power of America, henceforth the question: if the crash is that of an extraterrestrial craft, could it really be considered an accident or could it possibly be deliberate, thus being some sort of a message and/or authenticating it?".

Considering the final destination of the report, which is said on the front cover, to have been President Jacques Chirac and Prime minister Lionel Jospin, and the rank of the people involved, one can only be very alarmed by such statements which will no doubt go against the goals COMETA wished to serve. One understands, why other suggestions like the creation of a governmental office (yet another...) which would go hand in hand with SEPRA, or re-funding of the latter will probably go unaddressed.

We sincerely hope we are wrong but if we are not, this report will jeopardize any serious or official interest on the UFO phenomenon in France for years to come.

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