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## UFO UpDates Mailing List

### Re: French COMETA Report

From: Gildas Bourdais <[GBourdais@aol.com](mailto:GBourdais@aol.com)>  
Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 12:00:32 EDT  
Fwd Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 17:22:22 -0400  
Subject: Re: French COMETA Report

>Date: Thu, 22 Jul 1999 00:39:56 +0200  
>From: Perry Petrakis - SOS OVNI <[sosovni@pacwan.fr](mailto:sosovni@pacwan.fr)>  
>To: [updates@globalserve.net](mailto:updates@globalserve.net)  
>Subject: French COMETA Report

Perry Petrakis, of the French group "SOS OVNI", and director of the French review "Phenomena", has made an "assessment" of the "COMETA" report (wrongly called IHEDN report), in the name of SOS OVNI. He claims this assessment to be much needed in order to counterbalance information "of little informative value" already given by "enthusiastic French ufologists".

I have some questions and comments to make on this "assessment".

>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).

Why "junior"? All these people are senior military and civilian officers four generals, an admiral, a general former director of IHEDN, etc.

The report refers several times to the "Association des auditeurs de l'IHEDN (AA)". It never mentions "junior". The fact that this an Institute of Higher studies implies of course that auditors were still young officers when they participated, but this mention "junior", when talking of senior officers, does not make any sense except that Mr Perry Petrakis labors at reducing the status of the committee.

>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.

First, on what grounds Petrakis can he present a collective view? How did he manage to get a collective approval, in such a short time, of his very critical view on an important document of that kind? I understand that members of SOS OVNI, the most numerous French organization, are scattered over all the French territory. Should we rather assume that he is expressing his own views, hoping that other folks will follow him? Or are the

members such a disciplined block that he does not have to worry about that? Well, I suppose he can reassure us easily on this question.

Now about low quality information given by "enthusiastic ufologists". So far, I know of only two favorable opinions already expressed on the internet : by Thierry Wathelet, who Belgian, and myself. That makes only one "enthusiastic French ufologist", and it's me! Or then, who are the other enthusiasts??

One point point is true here: I have given little information so far because I am still preparing an English summary, on which I hope to have the approval of a representative of COMETA.

>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 meaning of the acronym COMETA does not seem to be an important matter to me. According to Thierry Wathelet it means "Comité d'études approfondies", but, who cares? And, again, "junior", applied to a very senior group!

<snip>

>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".

What is the simple truth in this petty quarrel? General Norlain explains very clearly that General Letty came to see him in 1995, when he was at the head of IHEDN, to get his support in the creation of an independant group od study of UFOs. Norlain encouraged him and addressed him to the Association of Auditors (AA), which in turn gave its support to the project. Several members of AA participated to the group. So, yes, COMETA is very close to IHEDN. The last sentence of General Norlain does not seem inappropriate to me since many members of COMETA come from IHEDN. There is no big fuss here, and no dishonesty, as hinted wrongly by Mr Perry Petrakis.

>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.

This seems to be a correct assessment. And I think it's a good move!

<snip>

>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 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.

This is an irrelevant critique. They have selected a few very good cases: fine! They may have avoided the Belgian wave because it is a very complex case. Even among ufologists, there is not 100 % agreement on everything. Professor Auguste Meessen, for instance, leaves the door open to a natural explanation for F-16 radar returns. But he affirms very firmly that there was a UFO wave. By the way, Petrakis mentioned in his review (N° 33) a most ridiculous explanation of the Belgian wave - the "LowFlyte" - at a time when it had been already fully exposed by Thierry Wathelet as pure garbage: a small scale prototype was presented to the press in 1996!

However, Petrakis just commented in his review :  
"It seems improbable that the craft could be at the origin of the observations in Belgium, etc..).  
Improbable, indeed!

>Contrarily to what has been said, although members of COMETA may  
>be considered courageous 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.

Who said that??

>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.

There is an unpleasant insinuation here, if I read correctly between the lines : that this report is the voice of the French military-industrial complex. Maybe they are after some juicy research contracts : is this what you imply here?

>Unless these people have insider information, which would have  
>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' whose  
>debunking scheme, especially (but not only) over Roswell would  
>seem logical if we are to believe they have acquired otherworldly  
>objects.

Now we hit at a speculative part of the report, the Annex 5 on Roswell. No, they don't take Roswell for granted, but yes they point to some undisputable facts ("faits indiscutables"). For instance, that the GAO did not accept the balloon explanation (contrary to what was written in the French press at the time, notably by sociologist Pierre Lagrange : this parenthesis is mine). Apart from that, no, this report does not present North America as the "Big Black Wolf"! We fall in caricature here.

They quote two opinions on Roswell, one of which is presented here wrongly by Petrakis as being their opinion :

>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,  
>'Independence 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?".

This is by no means presented as the definite opinion of the COMETA. Interesting hypothesis, though.

On the other hand, yes, COMETA points to evidence of US Air Force disinformation on Roswell, and cites Lagrange as a "victim" of it!

<snip>

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.

>>

One general remark here. What is the true mediatic and governmental situation in France? One of deep skepticism on the mere existence of UFOs. What about government and political circles? Just one exemple. Claude Allegre, who is a scientist, and is the French ministry of National Education, is known to be of the old socialist/rationalist school. These people will not admit UFOs until they see one in their garden, and I am not even sure of that. My guess is that COMETA decided to publish their report in an attempt to circumvent that obstacle.

The French UFO press consists merely of small two periodicals available in newsstands (the others being confidential bulletins): "Anomalies", directed by Pierre Lagrange, and "Phenomena", directed by Pery Petrakis. We have just seen how Petrakis treats information. From Lagrange, we just had yesterday a full page article in one of the three major national daily papers, "Liberation". (date July 21, page 5). Let's just quote the subtitle : "Between "X Files" and "Independance Day", the report of "experts" published by "VSD" feeds disinformation of ufos by ridiculing the subject".

Explication: they dare to talk about Roswell : that can only be disinformation, just like sinister conspirationist theories! This accusation is totally ridiculous. Actually, the report clearly denounces that kind of disinformation, which they call "amplifying disinformation on UFOs". What a mess!

Regards to all  
Gildas Bourdais

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