

Valéry Giscard d'Estaing (1926- ...)

President of the Republic from 1974 to 1981, Valéry Giscard d'Estaing has to confront the possibility of the left's winning the legislative elections of 1978. He affirms that he will not resign and thus goes counter to the Gaullist practice that has prevailed until then. His interpretation of the Constitution also makes cohabitation possible.

Some have wanted to deny the President of the Republic of the right to express himself. What a strange Republic it would be if it were led by a mute! No one has the right to dictate my behavior. I act as a head of state and according to my consciousness and my consciousness tells me this.

The President of the Republic is not a partisan. He is not the head of a party. But he can also not remain indifferent to the fate of France. His role is to defend the nation's higher interests. His mandate is longer than the deputies'.¹

The Constitution thus holds that every President necessarily sees legislative elections and, if it gave him such major responsibilities, it is not for him to stay a mute spectator. Among my responsibilities, I have that of thinking constantly, daily, of the problems of the future, and of warning citizens against any choice that would make driving France's affairs difficult. This is the task that befalls me this evening. I will give you all the elements you need to enlighten your decision. But, in republican France, the decision will depend on you.

What would the French think and say if, given this circumstance, their President were to remain silent? They would think he was lacked the courage to assume all of his responsibilities. And they would be right. But the President is also not the electoral agent of any given party. General de Gaulle was not, nor will I be. The President does not belong to the play between parties. He must look higher and further, and think first of all of the nation's higher interest. It is in this spirit that I address you here. As a judge, I will explain myself with moderation, beyond polemic and personal quarrels. As someone with political responsibilities, I will speak to you of the right choice [...]

You may choose the application of the *Programme commun*². It is your right to do so. But if you choose it, it will be applied. Do not believe that, according to the Constitution, the President of the Republic has the means to oppose it, and I would be failing in my duties were I not to have warned you.

Valéry Giscard D'Estaing, *Speech at Verdun sur le Doubs*, January 27, 1978.
translation by Will Bishop

¹ Seven years up until the October 2, 2000 five-year mandate reform.

² The political program adopted conjointly by the Socialist Party and the Communist Party on June 26, 1972.

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