

Committee: Special Political and Decolonization Committee

Issue: The question of French Polynesia

Student Officer: Myrto Der Krikorian

Position: Co-Chair

PERSONAL INTRODUCTION

Dear Delegates,

My name is Myrto Der Krikorian, I am an IB1 student at Geitonas School, and it is my honour to serve as a Co-Chair of the Special Political and Decolonization Committee of the 4th ACG – MUN Conference, hoping to help you all create memories as beautiful as my own. I have attended 7 MUN conferences so far, and each and every one of them has been an amazing experience for me. I can assure you that MUN is more than a simulation. It will help you witness and participate in a productive debate, boost your public speaking skills and understand the impact of international collaboration of countries and organizations on overcoming serious issues of our century.

This year's ACG MUN Agenda focuses on the second Goal of the UN, which is Zero Hunger. As we see on the news and media, it is an important issue that affects most of the countries. Thus, it is now the time to rethink how we grow, share and consume our food. Specifically, the Special Political and Decolonization Committee Committee offers a chance to further elaborate on the issues of French Polynesia and the territorial forces in the Republic of Moldova. With that being said, both mine and your knowledge on the worldwide issues examined will expand through this wonderful journey.

As a Co-Chair, it is my responsibility to provide you with a study guide that will not only help you research and form effective resolutions on the question of French Polynesia but also make you understand how crucial the topic is. However, you shall bear in mind that the specific guide is useful to introduce you to the topic but should not be the only source of your study. In other words, additional research is needed. Should any questions come up while studying, you are more than welcome to send me an email at mn10584@geitonas.edu.gr

I am looking forward to meeting you all at 4th ACG MUN Conference.

Your Chair,

Myrto Der Krikorian

TOPIC INTRODUCTION

French Polynesia is a set of islands that is an overseas country attached to France.¹ It is located in the South Pacific Ocean, between California and Australia. As a former colony of France since the 19th century, French Polynesia recently gained its internal autonomy. It has greater autonomy than many other French possessions, like Djibouti and French Guiana. The islands have even formed their own Assembly; the French Polynesia Assembly has its own President who is elected by the Assembly. French Polynesia is autonomous in all areas with the exception of aspects related to justice, security, monetary policy, tertiary education, immigration, defence and foreign policy.

However, since 1966, French Polynesia has been used as a nuclear test territory, which has affected both the environment and the residents' health. This issue is often discussed by the region and Metropolitan France, which is currently the world's second-biggest nuclear electricity producer, resulting in conducting many nuclear tests in the islands of French Polynesia. Hence, there has been a steady increase in the number of radiation-induced diseases, bad food quality and an increase in economic and social corruption, affecting almost 300,000 people living there.



Figure 1 Nuclear tests in French Polynesia

The issue of independence is an ambiguous and heated issue as well in French Polynesia. Unlike New Caledonia, a fellow overseas collectivity of France, the region examined has not conducted an independence referendum. Thus, many French Polynesian politicians are constantly expressing their consents and insisting on their independence from France. On the other hand, it is worth mentioning that the majority of the residents, seeing the results of New Caledonia's referendum, do not

¹ French Polynesia | Master Liveboards. https://www.masterliveboards.com/french_polynesia/

wish to retain their status as a French overseas collectivity. Arguably, since 2013, French Polynesia has requests numerous referendums that have all been denied by the national government of France. Hence, there is political instability in French Polynesia where the people are divided between the pro-independence and pro-French political parties.

During their preparation, delegates should bear in mind that in order to tackle the issue as effectively as possible, they must acknowledge the complexity of it and the understanding required to attempt to resolve it.

DEFINITION OF KEY TERMS

Overseas collectivity (of France)

“Often named by the acronym DROM-COM, the ‘Overseas Departments and Regions – Overseas Collectivities’ refer collectively to all land under French sovereignty outside mainland France”²

Overseas Countries

“A collection of nations that have unique relations with members of the European Union. Each has signed an association agreement that provides, among other things, freedom of movement for workers, special tariff considerations, and freedom of establishment.”³

Nuclear Testing

Nuclear testing is defined as “the process of exploding a nuclear weapon to assess its effectiveness.”⁴

Referendum

A referendum (plural; referendums or formal; referenda) is “a vote in which all the people in a country or an area are asked to give their opinion about or decide an important political or social question”⁵

² France.fr. “French Overseas Territories.” *France.fr*, France FR, 17 Dec. 2019, <https://uk.france.fr/en/news/article/french-overseas-territories>

³ “What Is Overseas Countries and Territories (OCT)? Definition and Meaning.” *BusinessDictionary.com*, <http://www.businessdictionary.com/definition/Overseas-Countries-and-Territories-OCT.html>.

⁴ “Nuclear Testing: Meaning of Nuclear Testing by Lexico.” *Lexico Dictionaries | English*, Lexico Dictionaries, https://www.lexico.com/definition/nuclear_testing.

⁵ “REFERENDUM: Meaning in the Cambridge English Dictionary.” *Cambridge Dictionary*, <https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/referendum>.

Metropolitan France

“Metropolitan France is the part of France located in Europe. It can also be described as mainland France or as the French mainland and the island of Corsica.”⁶

Atoll

“An atoll is a ring-shaped coral reef, island, or series of islets. The atoll surrounds a body of water called a lagoon.”⁷

Autonomy/independence

“Autonomy is the state of being self-governed. On the other hand, independence is the state of not being dependent on another. The concept of independence implies a rejection of rules and regulations, but this is not the case in autonomy. This is the key difference between autonomy and independence.”⁸

No-confidence vote

A no-confidence vote is “a formal vote by which the members of a legislature or similar deliberative body indicate that they no longer support a leader, government, etc.”⁹

Non-Self-Governing Territory

“In the UN Charter, a Non-Self-Governing Territory is defined as a Territory “whose people have not yet attained a full measure of self-government”.”¹⁰

French Polynesia Assembly

The French Polynesia Assembly “is composed of 57 members elected for five years by direct universal suffrage and representing the five archipelagos of French Polynesia (Windward Islands, Leeward Islands, Austral Islands, Tuamotu Islands Gambier and Marquesas). It adopts deliberations, but also “laws of the country”, the latter may be subject to control by the Council of State in Paris. The 57 members of the Assembly of

⁶ “Definitions for Metropolitan France.” *What Does Metropolitan France Mean?*, [https://www.definitions.net/definition/metropolitan france](https://www.definitions.net/definition/metropolitan%20france).

⁷ National Geographic Society. “Atoll.” *National Geographic Society*, 9 Oct. 2012, <https://www.nationalgeographic.org/encyclopedia/atoll/>.

⁸ “What Is the Difference between Autonomy and Independence?” *English Language & Usage Stack Exchange*, 1 Mar. 1968, <https://english.stackexchange.com/questions/431116/what-is-the-difference-between-autonomy-and-independence>.

⁹ “Vote Of No Confidence.” *Merriam-Webster*, Merriam-Webster, [https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vote of no confidence](https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/vote%20of%20no%20confidence).

¹⁰ “UN, United Nations, Non-Self-Governing Territories, Decolonization, Independence, Self-Determination.” *United Nations*, United Nations, <https://www.un.org/en/events/nonselfgoverning/>.

French Polynesia elect the president of this institution and annually vote the budget of French Polynesia.”¹¹

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The government state of French Polynesia

Since French Polynesia has its own Assembly, its government type is considered to be a parliamentary democracy. However, it was in 1946 that this type was established, and French Polynesia became an overseas territory of France. Beforehand, the islands were controlled by the French Government and were considered a French colony. Nowadays, French Polynesia has great autonomy and is often recognized as an overseas country, which happens to have greater independence than that of an overseas territory. The islands have their own 57-seat Assembly, called the French Polynesia Assembly, whose members are elected by adult suffrage. French Polynesia Assembly, through a simple majority vote, elects the president who serves for five years, currently Edouard Fritch, an advisory council was formed, called Economic, Social and Cultural Council (ESCC) which is essential for the territory’s functioning. It is made up of representatives from trade unions, various professional societies and other cultural organizations. It is worth mentioning that French Polynesia has its own flag, seal and anthem in conjunction with French national symbols. The islands are represented in the French Parliament by two deputies and two senators. Lastly, French Polynesians are French citizens who have the right to live anywhere in France. They also have the right to vote both in local and French national elections. In 2013 the United Nations General Assembly recognized French Polynesia as a Non-Self-Governing Territory.

Nuclear Testing

Mururoa, an atoll in French Polynesia was used as an uninhabited land, specialized to grow coconut. However, since 1966, after the islands’ annexation by France, the atoll was used clearly for nuclear weapon tests conducted by Metropolitan France. The main reason that France developed the production of nuclear weapons so much was to enforce the national strike force, called force de frappe, especially developed in the 1960s, so as to be militarily equipped during the Cold War. Until 1996, France conducted 193 nuclear tests in the Overseas Territory. Although many protests were made by the French Polynesia Assembly, the tests continued.

After a few years, the tests became more controversial. The majority of the countries like the United States and the Soviet Union had abandoned the nuclear

¹¹ “Les Institutions.” *La Présidence De La Polynésie Française*, 17 May 2018, <https://www.presidence.pf/les-institutions/>.

weapon testing in 1963, but the French continued until the mid-1970s. In 1975, after the protests and the pressure by New Zealand, the tests were made underground. Despite the good intentions of the specific move, there was huge environmental destruction that affected the ecosystems and especially the oceans, causing the tired mountain syndrome, in which underground nuclear testing damages the rocks, increasing permeability and the risk of releasing radioactive contamination.

A moratorium was placed on nuclear testing, but in 1995 the French president decided to lift it so that France could try out new nuclear tools. This decision was supported by most of France's European allies and other countries like Australia and Japan. However, many Tahitians in French Polynesia were angered and decided to organize riots in their capital. After the million-dollars' worth of damage and the airport's burning, Chirac, the then Prime Minister of France ended the tests in the Pacific in 1996, by signing the UN Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT).

Unfortunately, the effects of French Nuclear testing in the Pacific remain reverberating. Investigations conducted in 1950 started showing the destructive effects that radioactivity has on humans' health. Hence, the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT) was signed in 1963 which banned nuclear testing in the atmosphere, outer space and underwater but not underground. However, France did not sign and continued atmospheric testing. Over the past century, there was a gradual increase in knowledge about the dangers of radiation activities. Specifically, according to the United Nations Scientific Committee on the Effects of Atomic Radiation (UNSCEAR), radiation exposure can damage, kill or modify living cells. When many cells inflict harm and there is no treatment, the modification will be transferred to other cells as well, causing cancer, hereditary disorders or death. The majority of the 1500,000 military and civilian personnel involved in nuclear testing, developed serious health issues. Additionally, radioactive particles that fall to earth contaminate the air, soil, water and the food supply. Finally, the radioactivity in French Polynesia increased 2000 times the usual level.

Due to the harsh exploitation made by France, in 2018, the country was taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC), where it was accused by Oscar Temaru, the archipelago's former president of "Crimes against humanity". Since France long denied its responsibility for the health and environmental consequences related to the tests, the former president specifically said; "We owe it to all the people who died from the consequences of nuclear colonialism".¹² Thus, after three decades of nuclear testing, France was officially sued. However, Annick Girardin, France's overseas

¹² Wires, News. "France Faces Hague Complaint over Polynesia Nuclear Tests." France 24, France 24, 10 Oct. 2018, www.france24.com/en/20181010-france-faces-hague-complaint-french-polynesia-nuclear-tests-international-criminal-court.

minister, commented that the case mentioned is an abuse of the international court for domestic political purposes.



Figure 2 Mururoa in June 2000, 4 years after the cessation of French nuclear testing

Autonomy and independence

As a result of the destruction caused by the nuclear tests, the French Polynesian government tried to make the country completely autonomous and independent from France. In 1946, the islands became France's overseas territory and therefore the islands' name was established. Additionally, Polynesians were granted French citizenship. In 1977, after the first negotiations between French Polynesia and metropolitan France, the islands were granted partial internal autonomy which was extended 7 years afterwards. As mentioned before, nowadays, French Polynesia is already the most autonomous French territory, having its own government and being recognized as a non-self-governing territory. However, as a French overseas collectivity, the French Polynesian local government has no competence in justice, university education, security and defence. On 27 Feb 2004, a new statute came into view, strengthening French Polynesia's autonomy. The territory was then redefined as "an overseas country within the French Republic.

However, the French politician and former president of French Polynesia, Oscar Temaru, not satisfied with the current autonomy of French Polynesia, has been fighting for 35 years for independence. He supports that French Polynesia could conduct a referendum, like the one of New Caledonia. More specifically, he insists the UN organize the referendum, instead of France. France on the other hand has been for long declining his requests.

Political instability

It can be stated that French Polynesia is facing a political crisis for the past century, mainly due to the fact that many people want to be completely independent of France, whereas others only support their autonomy, without wanting to reach the stage of independence. In other words, there is a political battle between the pro-independence and pro-France parties.

The main party that has been elected multiple times in French Polynesia, having Oscar Temaru as its president, is the Tavini Huiraatira. It was founded in 1977 and has been supporting the idea of independence ever since. It was affected by the nuclear tests and has been protesting since, in order to stop these tests. Arguably, this party wants to follow New Caledonia's example and conduct a referendum so as to finally, formally discuss their question on independence. Therefore, its president, Temaru, irritated metropolitan France by attending a US conference, without French permission so as to discuss de-colonialization.

However, not all French Polynesians want independence. It is actually safe to say that the majority of the population wants to be fully autonomous but not independent. Metropolitan France provides heavy subsidies to all of its territories, making the islands their

territory, keeping in mind that French Polynesia is more economically grown than many of the islands in the Pacific because of France's monetary assistance. Hence, in 1977, another, more conservative right-headed party was founded, called Tāhō'ēra'a Huira'atira,

which supports the islands' autonomy. Its leader, Gaston Flosse, managed to pass a motion of a no-confidence vote, against his political opponent Oscar Temaru just before the local elections for the Territorial Assembly, so as to prevent his push for independence.

In 2016, another party was founded called Tapura Huiraatira, which managed to win a huge victory in 2018's territorial elections obtaining 49% of the overall voting. The party leader, Edouard Fritch, caused a commotion between himself, Temaru and Flosse who expressed feelings of betrayal by the people of French Polynesia. Tapura Huiraatira is an anti-independence and pro-autonomy party and thus continues to maintain and grow the relationship between the islands and metropolitan France.



Figure 3 The French Polynesian Flag

MAJOR COUNTRIES AND ORGANIZATIONS INVOLVED

France

At this point, it should be said that France is directly connected to the issue. French Polynesia is France's territory and hence it is up to France's discursion whether French Polynesia should be completely independent or just autonomous. Not only does the country affect the political stability of the territory, but also has conducted the tests that have caused such a great catastrophe. Nevertheless, as mentioned before France has been sued by the ICC for committing "crimes against humanity". Therefore, it can be easily understood that France is both directly and indirectly affected by the issue examined.

New Zealand

French Polynesia and New Zealand enjoy a warm relationship and maintain close cultural links. The citizens of New Zealand come from French Polynesia and therefore the languages of the two regions are also closely related. New Zealand is currently examining the sinking of Greenpeace's ship "Rainbow Warrior" which was bombed by French foreign intelligence services at the Port of Auckland, New Zealand, on 10 Jul 1985. To sum up, New Zealand has been working into developing strong tights with French Polynesia.

World Health Organization (WHO)

The World Health Organization (WHO) operates in French Polynesia through the representative office in South Pacific. It helps with tackling health issues of public concerns. Specifically, WHO supports the government of French Polynesia in ensuring a quality health system and improving the general social protection system for optimum coverage of health and social needs. WHO has restored multiple health programs and events aiming to protect people from the effects of emerging diseases, environmental hazards and climate change.¹³

People's Republic of China

China and French Polynesia maintain good relations. Approximately 5-10% of the territory's population has a Chinese origin. Hence, China is one of the main trade partners of French Polynesia. However, although Polynesian ambassadors have tried to promote the islands as a popular touristic destination, only less than 6000 Chinese travellers visit French Polynesia annually. Fortunately, in Mururoa toll, the place where nuclear tests took place, Chinese producers, taking advantage the territory's great autonomy, will begin a new operation, a fish farm, aiming to produce more than

¹³ "Our Work." *World Health Organization*, World Health Organization, www.who.int/frenchpolynesia/our-work.

50000 tons of fish. This is a crucial step for Polynesia’s flourishing economy, as it will ease the territory’s suffering from high unemployment rate and the huge trade deficit, where only 6% of its inputs are covered by its exports.¹⁴



Figure 4 Negotiations between French Polynesia and China

TIMELINE OF EVENTS

Date	Description of event
1881	The set of islands were annexed by France and, thus became a French colony.
1946	French Polynesia became an overseas territory of France, governed by Charles de Gaulle, and the region’s people obtained French citizenship and the right to vote.
1966	Nuclear testing began in Mururoa atoll.
1975	Protests and constant complaints from New Zealand made the nuclear tests move underwater.
1977	French Polynesia was granted partial internal autonomy
1982	The UN Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty was signed
1984	French Polynesia’s autonomy was extended

¹⁴ Goulard, Sébastien. “French Polynesia at the Chinese Crossroads.” – *The Diplomat*, For The Diplomat, 8 Sept. 2017, thediplomat.com/2017/09/french-polynesia-at-the-chinese-crossroads/.

1985	French intelligence operatives located in Auckland, New Zealand, sunk Rainbow Warrior, a Greenpeace fleet.
1996	Nuclear testing in French Polynesia halts completely.
2003	French Polynesia, an overseas collectivity, is considered to be an overseas country because of its increased autonomy status.
2004	There was a grave political crisis in French Polynesia. As a result, the former president Oscar Temaru was voted out of his position which was then obtained by Gaston Flosse.
2010	Legal regulation concerning nuclear testing was passed in the French National Assembly.
2013	French Polynesia was added to the list of Non-Self-Governing Territories by the UN Special Committee on Decolonization (UNSDC).
2018	France was taken to the International Criminal Court (ICC) for nuclear weapons in French Polynesia and then sued for crimes against humanity over nuclear tests in South Pacific.

RELEVANT RESOLUTIONS, TREATIES AND EVENTS

Self-determination of French Polynesia, 17 May 2013 (A/RES/67/265)

The United Nations adopted this resolution on 23^{Aug} 2013, aiming to establish French Polynesia's status, by adding it to the list of the Non-Self-Governing Territories. This was an important resolution because it was made clear that the UN recognizes French Polynesian autonomy.

Question of French Polynesia, 19 Jun 2018 (A/RES/109/2018)

This resolution, adopted on 19^{Jun} 2018, examined French Polynesia's request for having self-determination. However, although the UN-recognized French Polynesia's right to self-determination, the territory did not meet the criteria for being acknowledged as self-governed.

UN Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), 10 Sept 1996 (A/RES/50/245)

This treaty needs to be pointed out because France signed this resolution enforcing a previous one called “Comprehensive test-ban treaty” which the country did not ratify in the past. According to the CTBT, all nuclear explosions are banned and thus the nuclear testing in French Polynesia stopped.

PREVIOUS ATTEMPTS TO SOLVE THE ISSUE

There have been many ways that both French Polynesia and the UN have tried to put an end to these issues mentioned. It would be safe to say that the most efficient and important one is the establishment of the CTBT which signalled the end of the nuclear tests in the territory. However, many consequences are even faced today by the people of French Polynesia. As a result, France had to face a lawsuit in the ICC over the tests that led many people to death. The intervention of the ICC played a crucial role in order for France to pay for all the crimes that have committed against French Polynesia

As to the political aspect of the topic, Oscar Temaru and other representatives of the pro-independence parties have been fighting for their complete independence. Up until now, the territory has formed its own type of local government and has achieved being one of the most autonomous territories of France. The UN as well has helped by discussing the situation in French Polynesia and constructing resolution that has changed completely the territory’s status. Specifically, French Polynesia is now in the list of the Non-Self-Governing Territories and has the right to self-determination which is a huge step towards independence.

POSSIBLE SOLUTIONS

Negotiations between the governments of French Polynesia and Metropolitan France

Negotiations are of vital importance and the most sensible and obvious solution, especially between the government of France and the Local government of French Polynesia. Through the negotiations, the authorities can find a solution and settle the terms so as to find common grounds on the issues of nuclear testing and the issue of the territory’s independence.

Another possible scenario could be that the UN participate in the negotiations so as to find the most effective and compromising resolution that both parts have agreed on.

Strengthening the legal framework

Strengthening the legal framework is another way in which the issues can be tackled. Treaties like the UN Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), can surely be helpful when applied more practically and efficiently.

Frameworks concerning the tests of nuclear weapons have been signed by the government of France and hence re-evaluating them and bridging the gaps in the legislative systems would be of major significance to prevent future damage that France may cause.

Possibility of a Referendum

As already suggested by many French Polynesian politicians, a referendum would be a great opportunity for the governments of metropolitan France and French Polynesia to see what do the people want to say about the issues that take place in French Polynesia. Nevertheless, for this referendum to happen, the government of the territory must seriously establish educational programs or mass media campaigns so as to make the people understand the advantages and disadvantages prior to such a referendum. Hence, the overall awareness and participation of the people is important so as to be taken into consideration when dealing with the issues of French Polynesia. It should also be noted that France has refused multiple times to organize such a referendum so the UN could intervene by organizing it without being affected by the French government.

Negotiations between French Polynesian government and the European Union

The government of French Polynesia must seriously understand the consequences of turning its autonomy into complete independence. To give an illustration, having no relations with France means that the diplomatic relations between French Polynesia and other European countries may be lost. Therefore, it would have a significant effect if the government of French Polynesia knew the consequences of its decisions concerning foreign affairs, prior to taking another step towards independence.

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MULTIMEDIA RESOURCES

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