Citizens of France,
My dear compatriots,

Today, on 12 December, the New Caledonians were called for the third time to vote on obtaining full sovereignty. Following the referendums on 4 November 2018 and on 4 October 2020, the New Caledonians have massively voted against full sovereignty and independence, to a backdrop of low turnout.

New Caledonia will therefore remain French.

When they signed the Matignon Agreement on 26 June 1988, Jean-Marie Tjibaou and Jacques Lafleur opened a path of hope for New Caledonia.

A few weeks later, on 6 November 1988, the whole Nation was called to the ballot box to approve the agreement, confirming in that vote the promises exchanged by these two great figures of New Caledonia’s history and the relevance of the pathway sketched out by Michel Rocard.

Ten years later, on 5 May 1998, the elected representatives of New Caledonia and the government signed the Nouméa Agreement, paving the way for a future, institutions and a horizon for New Caledonia.

Today, true to the wisdom of our elders, we are together taking a further step. The Nouméa Agreement has legally expired. The promise of a “shared destiny” that it embodied has never been as tangible as today and must continue to guide us.

Tonight, to use the customary good words, I welcome New Caledonia’s answer to the question it was asked, with respect and humility.

Respect for the promise that was made, for the Nouméa Agreement, which brought us to this result, together.

Respect for all the people of New Caledonia, all of them: those who wanted it to remain in France, and those who wanted independence.

Respect with a hint of gratitude, for all those who have worked for long months to make this vote happen: mayors and their staff, government departments, political movements, members of the electoral commission, and international observers. And for all New Caledonians.

Humility, because the path opened by our predecessors is greater than us. Thirty years, three consultations, and a process unique worldwide, supervised by the United Nations. We are mere participants in a long history, but we can be proud of the unprecedented, pacifying path we have taken.
Humility, because we will need time, still. While the three consultations have led three times to the answer “no” to independence, each has borne different messages that we must take into account in all their complexity, and we cannot ignore the fact that voters have remained profoundly divided, despite the passing of the years.

Humility, lastly, before the scale of the task ahead of us. A period of transition is beginning, in which, freed from the dichotomy between the “yes” and “no”, we need to build a shared project, recognizing and respecting everybody’s dignity.

The Minister for Overseas France is currently in New Caledonia, alongside the New Caledonians, at my request. In accordance with the commitments made on 1 June 2021, under the authority of the Prime Minister, he is there to listen to you, immediately, to prepare this new phase. We need to build an answer to institutional and legal questions, of course. They will be needed to design a political organization in line with the results of the three consultations. But the upcoming discussions cannot be limited to institutions. The ties between us are not merely legal. They are physical, human ties, ties of solidarity.

The last months have shown that. In the trying times of the public health crisis, national solidarity has proven even more tangible. In New Caledonia, like in the rest of France, the government’s action has had a single priority: saving lives and supporting the most vulnerable. Today, my thoughts go out to all those who are grieving loved ones. I want to tell them that they are in my thoughts, and they have my sympathy. The Nation is committed to standing by your sides.

During the crisis, the Nation has shown its face of today: its true face. We must be true to these ties of solidarity, respect and fraternity, and they are the ties that we will keep for the future. On many issues, the government and local institutions can and must work together. That includes emergencies, like those we must address in the coming weeks, like the economic situation, obviously the public health situation, the recovery, and the public accounts. The Minister will launch immediate discussions with your elected representatives on these issues.

They also include the need to reduce the inequalities that undermine the archipelago’s unity and our duty to New Caledonia’s young people: the nickel strategy, food and energy self-sufficiency, land issues, taxation, and fairer, greener growth, are all subjects that will enable us to bring this new growth model to fruition. The situation of the women of New Caledonia will also be a major priority in the coming years. They must play their full role in this shared destiny.

Lastly, we will have to build a place for New Caledonia in this region, the Indo-Pacific, that is seeing major shifts and tensions.

This new project is, as you can see, an ambitious one, and we will build it together, including with all those who in New Caledonia who are less than thirty years old and have never known anything but the Nouméa Agreement.

Tonight, as Head of State, guarantor of our institutions, I therefore solemnly take note of the result of these three consultations. They confirm the desire expressed by the majority of New Caledonians to remain part of the Republic and the French Nation.

The men and women of New Caledonia have chosen to remain French. They have chosen freely. For the Nation as a whole, that choice is a source of pride, and an acknowledgement. Tonight, France is more beautiful, because New Caledonia has decided to remain. It is up to all of us to write our history with ambition and respect: A history that remembers, unambiguously, what it owes to the Kanaks, a first nation recognized by the Nouméa Agreement and whose presence, within the national community, is an incalculable asset.

A history that recognizes, with no false pretences, the contribution of the New Caledonians who then arrived there to take root and live there as free men and women.
A history that looks to the future, towards the challenges of our century, the challenges of this Pacific ocean that is an integral part of our national space.

Citizens of France, dear compatriots of New Caledonia, France is proud to be your homeland. Tonight, it renews, for you, its commitment to protect you, to support you, whatever the circumstances.

Long live New Caledonia.
Long live the Republic.
Long live France.