

SGI Sustainable Governance
Indicators 2009

France report



Executive summary

There are fundamental changes ahead for France's political system as well as its economy and society. The public debate over the EU constitution showed that a large proportion of the French population as well as the country's political elite were aware that reform was needed. However, during and after the failed referendum, it remained unclear how France could implement reforms within the framework of the existing system. France's politics and culture are greatly influenced by a large gap between the group known as the political elite (people involved in politics, economics or the media) and the rest of the population, the majority of whom thinks economic reform is a reaction to global pressures of "hypercapitalism." The debate over the EU constitution was a sort of preparatory battle for the 2007 parliamentary and presidential elections. It anticipated the debate on the need for a political break ("rupture") that conservative party presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy had alluded to during his campaign. As a result, the political mood and debate in the country clearly changed in 2005-2007. While political paralysis was evident during the final phases of Jacques Chirac's presidency and the governments under Prime Minister Jean-Pierre Raffarin and Prime Minister Dominique de Villepin, the 2005 debates over the EU constitution and the 2007 electoral campaign offered the possibility to prepare reforms in the public sphere.

The debate leading up to the referendum undoubtedly showed that the policies of the European Union, aimed at liberalization and privatization, are met with substantial criticism in France. The "Bolkestein Directive," called "neoliberal" by opponents, shaped the entire debate and illustrated the antagonism of the French political and media elite towards a "liberal Europe" as well as concern about the end of the French social model. The political situation and public sentiment following the referendum led to a debate on the reform of the political system. Although some observers have already talked about a "Sixth Republic," which would have to replace the constitution introduced by de Gaulle in 1958, the proposals for reform presented thus far would only bring relatively small institutional changes.

The strengthening of parliament and the opposition is regarded as being particularly important to establish a better system of "checks and balances."

The absolute strengthening of the executive, as was intended in the 1958 constitution, has led to repeated problems in the preparation and implementation of reforms. The latest example is the attempt made by the de Villepin government in 2006 to introduce legislation concerning first-time employment contracts (Contrat première embauche, or CPE) without prior consultation. The aim of the legislation was to diminish the high rate of youth unemployment in France by limiting the protections against dismissal given to first-time employees. It was expected that, as a result, employers would be more willing to hire young people. Following massive public protests by students and trade unions, the legislation was abolished. This event highlights the lack of intermediary and mediating institutions in France and explains why, in the eyes of the population, public protest is the most effective means of opposing government measures.

Other reforms, such as pension and social security, have to date shown a lack of ambition and been unsuccessful. Nevertheless in areas where the European Union is able to influence French politics through a policy of deregulation, changes have been made in the fields of telecommunications, the railways and the energy sector. To date, the French government has still delayed the liberalization of the post office, which must also be deregulated in accordance with European Union directives.

President Nicolas Sarkozy and the government under Prime Minister François Fillon at the time of writing submitted a catalogue of reform programs and announced their intention to rapidly implement measures. Areas for proposed reform include education, the employment market, the budget and related finances, public services and the constitution. The widespread reduction of taxes, the de facto restriction of the 35-hour working week and the announced cancellation of thousands of jobs in the public sector, as well as the promotion of education and research and innovation, demonstrate an economically liberal strategy that represented a serious break from most French tradition.

To finance tax cuts totaling billions of euros, Sarkozy has consolidated the French budget, which has led France into direct conflict with the provisions of the European Stability and Growth Pact (SGP). In the long run, the success of these reforms will not depend on whether they affect the basic structure of France's political system and its deep-rooted political and economical models of centralism, interventionism and belief in the state.

By bringing his political opponents into the government, Sarkozy has shown his desire to implement real change in government policy. The admission of politicians with immigrant backgrounds into the government (Minister of Justice Rachida Dati, Secretary of State in charge of foreign affairs Rama Yade

and Secretary of State for urban policies Fadela Amara) also demonstrates that Sarkozy does in fact act according to his pledge of a “rupture” of French tradition.

Strategic Outlook

The challenges for a broadly implemented and sustainable reform policy in France include increased competitiveness and innovation within the economic system; an improvement in social coherence and social dialogue; and reform of the social security and education systems. This reform agenda coincides with the agenda of many other European states, as well as with the European Union’s concept of reform established in the Lisbon strategy. France has been consistently regarded as the European country which has shown the most resistance to fundamental reforms and to overall challenges of globalization and Europeanization. Having said this, the changes that have taken place in some areas over recent years should not be underestimated.

Since the beginning of central government decentralization in the 1980s, the traditional image of France as a centralized state has changed somewhat. State intervention has decreased (although the practice is still high when compared internationally) and the government’s prudent policy of privatization, coupled with the opening of the French market, show that French politics, economics and society have succumbed to reform pressure in some areas, predominantly as a result of European Union policies.

Despite the first tentative reforms, challenges are still enormous. This makes the traditional approaches, methods and principles of French policy such as interventionism, protectionism and centralized, top-down state control seem unsuitable. It appears that the self-perception in France of politics, economics and society is challenged by globalization and Europeanization to a larger degree than in other European states.

The debate over the EU constitution in 2005 was effectively a wake-up call for the country, showing the public that reforms of the “French way of life” could not be postponed any longer. Thus, it was not surprising that the electoral campaigns in 2007 focused completely on the need for reform and the extent the required changes would break from the existing system (the central slogan of presidential candidate Nicolas Sarkozy’s electoral campaign was “rupture”).

The necessary adjustments can be divided into two areas. On the one hand,

concrete policy reform is required, such as in economic policy. On the other hand, a reform of politics and political culture is necessary; some believe that a “cultural revolution” is required in France. It is clear that changes in this particular area can only be expected to be applied over a long period of time.

When reforming individual areas of policy, focus is given to a number of issues. The first and most important is France’s international competitiveness. High labor costs are not the real problem, but rather the top-down approach of French economic policy, with its state “billion program” leading to the establishment of national “champions” within a few limited high-tech areas. To achieve the goals of the Lisbon program (3 percent of GNP should be spent on research and development), a fundamental reform of France’s research strategy has been recommended, as well as a modernization of its universities and the national promotion of research in private business.

The government under Prime Minister François Fillon has tackled this issue with plans to increase the autonomy of universities and state subsidies for education by around 50 percent in the next five years. The strengthening of regions as business investment centers and the development of regional competition clusters, supported by the state since 2005, should be promoted further. The political strengthening of economically prosperous regions should not be used as a counterargument by the central government against the development of new opportunities created by decentralization. According to skeptics, further reforms in this area go against the republican principle of the unity of the state. The visible economic successes of the regions, which benefit the whole state, will lead to the weakening of such arguments.

A second area in which reforms should be carried out concerns social relations and social coherence. The unrest in the Parisian suburbs over recent years has brought the problem of social coherence firmly to the government agenda. The government at the time of writing has announced its intention to definitively solve this problem by launching new programs. In the wake of these dramatic events, however, people had effectively forgotten that social problems had at least been partly reduced over the past few years by urban and education policies. These policies are targeted at certain societal groups, primarily unemployed young people with immigrant backgrounds.

The need to improve the relationship between French society and its political and social elite seems just as important, as does the need to strengthen the country’s weak civil society, giving it a greater responsibility in developing France’s reform policy. The government has recognized this problem and announced a new push to stimulate social dialogue. Fundamental changes are necessary in improving the self-perception of the state and society. These

include using social dialogue to help formulate political decisions, so once laws are passed, they are implemented with the support of a broad swath of society. Such changes and reforms face particularly large hurdles.

The government at the time of writing organized a series of consultations with social groups in 2007 concerning its reform projects. Yet for plans to prove successful, more is needed than just public meetings. Concrete rules are required to make the integration of social groups (to date only trade unions are included) into the decision-making process transparent. Such a development could lead to a genuine sharing of responsibility between social groups, increasing the acceptance of reforms and ameliorating political disenchantment.

A third area for reform concerns France's social security system, in which the national health insurance deficit is exorbitantly high (and private health insurance does not exist). Previous attempts to make citizens contribute even small amounts toward insurance coverage were met with heavy resistance. The pension system is characterized by a lack of transparency and innumerable special arrangements and privileges which are given to public-service employees (for example, early retirement). Changes implemented by the government in this area have also been met with resistance; for example, rail network staff called for a strike action in 2007. Nevertheless, a certain reversal of public opinion can be observed, showing that the public is aware of the need for social security reform and the inadequacies of existing structures. The necessity of such reform is evident by the increasing poverty among the elderly. This change in public perception could help to support the government in its reform efforts.

Further reforms relate to the employment market, the state budget and general finances. The new government announced a broad reform program for labor policy, based to some extent on German reforms, aimed at making the employment market more flexible. The 35-hour working week, introduced by the socialist government for public services, is set to be reevaluated, despite being seen by large parts of the public and trade unions as a central social achievement. Additionally the rise in unemployment benefits for low-wage workers, an increased pressure on unemployed persons to take available positions and the creation of a unified work agency should help to bring about further improvements in the labor market.

Government plans to reduce public debt to 60 percent of the GDP by 2012, to lower tax rates and to limit public spending show that Paris is pursuing a policy based only partly on reforms, when considering subsequent huge tax cuts that total some €1 billion. As a consequence, France has exceeded the permissible upper limits of the European Union Stability Pact for longer than expected,

bringing it into conflict with EU member states and other European countries.

A final area where further reforms are needed is with government decentralization. The government's project for regional and local development was started in the 1980s and accelerated under Jean-Pierre Raffarin after he became Prime Minister in 2002. According to administration expert Bruno Rémond, this project seems to have come to a halt under Prime Minister François Fillon's government and President Nicolas Sarkozy. New competencies have therefore been given to local authorities and départements as a result of Raffarin's reforms, but financial resources have not followed. The mixed financing and lack of transparency associated with these reforms have increased. French local authorities (there are almost 37,000 local groups; in comparison, Germany has approximately 14,000) are usually too small to be able to fulfill municipal tasks such as waste disposal and the maintenance of public sporting sites, as just a few examples. As a result, local authorities have increasingly joined forces with other localities; more than 18,000 of these institutions exist (Etablissements publics de coopération intercommunale, or Epci). There is a problem associated with this rather convenient mode of cooperation, namely that older, existing groupings such as the "Syndicats de communes" continue to operate, which results in an overlapping of competencies and a waste of financial resources.

Experts have criticized that France's government has become mired between competing notions of centralization and decentralization. The perception that the state alone can provide uniform living standards for its citizens points to the problem that has made further decentralization difficult. The success of reforms is, yet again, closely connected with a new definition of the traditional model of the French unified state.

In summary, it is evident that between 2005 and 2007 the French public and political elite became increasingly aware of the need for fundamental reforms in the fields of policy, economics and society. The debate over the EU constitution and electoral campaigns ensured that debates on reform were held in public. The mandate given to the Fillon government and to President Sarkozy shows that France seems adequately prepared to tackle reforms the government deems necessary. The long list of reform programs and the activism with which measures are being carried out leave doubt as to how successfully reforms can be implemented and how sustainable they will be.

The government's attempts to unite reforms in completely different areas under one roof and communicate them effectively will only prove successful if the reasoning for such reforms is made plausible. There are two central elements which are decisive for the success or failure of reform policy in France. First,

the multitude of individual measures could lead to a demand for rapid success (that in reality cannot happen) or to the hope of “illusory solutions.” Second, reform policies could be made more difficult in that the political elite and large parts of the population will reluctantly part with their old “illusions on life.”

This widespread misapprehension in France and in other European states imputes a much larger scope of action for national politics than is actually practical. A responsible and modern reform policy should be characterized by an intelligent application of the European Union supranational framework and scope to implement reforms. This will only succeed, however, if the public moves away from a second misapprehension, widespread both in France and in other European countries, that problems (caused by Europe and globalization) come from “outside” and, therefore, protectionism is an appropriate response.

Status Index

I. Status of democracy

Electoral process

Fair electoral process

Score: 10

The electoral process in France, as well as legal provisions governing the registration of candidates who stand for election, are completely fair. The level of fairness has gradually increased through the course of the 20th century. There are only a few minor restrictions which serve to ensure that only serious candidates stand for election. These include a requirement that each potential candidate has to obtain 500 signatures of support from elected persons, such as mayors or senators, from a third of French “départements,” or counties, to prove his or her commitment. In addition, candidates must pay a deposit of €15,000. These constraints did not lead to a reduction in the political spectrum of candidates for the last presidential election in 2007, in which 12 candidates put their names forward.

The legal provisions relating to parliamentary elections also promote a fair, transparent electoral process. In the 2007 National Assembly election, 7,540 candidates put their names forward for 577 seats.

Fair electoral campaign

Score: 8

During the official electoral campaign – which starts approximately 30 days before the date of the presidential election and 20 days before the parliamentary election – the public media (radio and TV) are obliged to report on political parties and candidates in a fair and impartial way. Financial expenditures during electoral campaigns are regulated to provide all candidates with equal opportunity in campaigning; rules on the fairness of electoral campaigns are determined by independent bodies (Commission nationale du contrôle; Conseil supérieur de l’audiovisuel). One expert alludes that, even up until the 1980s, the possibility for candidates who were considered too radical or who held beliefs that fell outside of mainstream political ideology to receive media

coverage was rare. This was, however, not a restriction that was introduced by the state, but rather a decision that was made by private media.

This example highlights that French public opinion is essentially shaped by electoral campaign reports from a small number of Paris-based media corporations that have a limited reach. For example, while 80 percent of the French population live in the so-called provinces, national daily newspapers are only available in the larger cities.

*Inclusive
electoral process*

Score: 10

A citizen's right to participate in elections and referenda is the most important of French civil law, which stems from the French Revolution. To take part in elections, citizens must register themselves. In principle, this takes place without any kind of discrimination.

In practice, there are a few technical issues that can present difficulties; for example, when local authorities do not have available a complete list of citizens. It is also evident that citizens with immigrant backgrounds – even when they are French citizens – often do not register to vote as does the average French-born citizen. This "voluntary" exclusion from elections is, however, only caused on a limited basis by legal provisions. Following the unrest in Parisian suburbs over the last four years, civil rights groups have done their utmost to ensure young people from these problem areas register to vote and exercise their civil rights.

Access to information

Media freedom

Score: 7

Freedom of the press also dates back to the French Revolution and the Declaration of Human and Civil Rights, drafted in 1789. It was not until 1984, through a Constitutional Court decision, that press freedom was actually given constitutional status. The media in France is free and independent. In reality, however, it appears that this general principle is limited. Politicians' direct and indirect influence or control over the media occurs in various ways. There is a discernable level of dependence resulting from the financial support and tax reductions offered by the French government to national newspapers and major news agencies, including the Agence France-Presse. As in other European countries, the concentration of media corporations in Paris is conducive to the varying level of reciprocal dependence between politics and the media. While the direct effect of politics on the media was particularly evident during the presidencies of the 1960s and 1970s, this has changed somewhat in recent times. The presidential election battle, which occurred at the time of writing in France, shows that President Nicolas Sarkozy can rely on the support of the main opinion-leading editorial houses to shape public opinion.

*Media pluralism**Score: 6*

The media in France covers a broad spectrum. There are more than 1,800 radio stations and no fewer than six television channels with programs that reach approximately 75 percent of the French population. A particular feature of the French media system is its oligopolistic structure, a result of the presence of financially strong industrial groups such as the Dassault Group and Suez, which own many forms of media, including a newspaper. Experts are nonetheless quick to point out that there have not been any burdensome restrictions on France's pluralistic media. In contrast, experts have highlighted that more discernible restrictions are caused by the strong concentration of media in Paris and the bipolarity (government vs. opposition) created by the media and its reporting.

*Access to government information**Score: 7*

In France, during the 1970s, European and U.S. models led to the development of legal provisions relating to public access to government information. French regulations do not reach as far as do laws in the United States, however. Although a general reference is provided in the Statute of 1978, there have been recurrent cases in which authorities have relied on confidentiality clauses to prevent access to documents.

Newly formed institutions such as CNIL (Commission nationale de l'informatique et des libertés) and CADA (Commission d'accès aux documents administratifs) help to ensure that citizens can obtain information from authorities; in reality it is predominantly academics that exercise this right. Despite the development of these organizations, waiting times for documents are still very lengthy (as much as 18 months) and often documents are restricted by authorities and held as "secret" without credible explanation. Nevertheless, the development of new technology, such as e-government and e-administration, has increased the possibility and outlets for citizens to obtain important information.

Civil rights*Civil rights protection**Score: 8*

France has a long tradition of protecting its citizens' civil rights that predates the 1970s, when the Constitutional Council's powers were strengthened. Although the courts generally serve to protect citizens and their rights, there have been some exceptions to this during times of war (e.g., World War II) and when the state perceived internal threats to abound (e.g., during the Algerian War). Today, the courts' ability to protect civil rights is hindered by the sheer number of complaints received. Insufficient personnel and other resources needed to process all of the complaints filed often result in lengthy case proceedings.

Non-discrimination
Score: 7

Legal provisions concerning non-discrimination play an important role in France. The principle of equality among citizens provides a foundation for legitimacy and self-perception within the French Republic. Daily life in France shows that regulations and laws are not able to prevent discrimination against French citizens with immigrant backgrounds. This is apparent in both the employment and housing markets, as well as in many other areas where discrimination continues, de facto.

In theory, the state's legal assurance of equality for citizens should serve to prevent active discrimination toward specific groups. In practice, this has not proven effective. A High Authority was set up in 2004 to put the politics of non-discrimination into practice by working closely with local authorities and businesses. The increasing number of cases that the High Authority is confronted with (1,400 in 2005 and 4,000 in 2006) demonstrates the genuine need for its existence. The High Authority's impact on daily life in France remains to be seen, however.

Rule of law

Legal certainty
Score: 7

Since the 1970s, France has increasingly abided by the rule of law. This process has been strongly influenced by the European Community and the increasing role of the Constitutional Council. Nonetheless, there are discrepancies between the actual content of laws and how they are put into practice to be noted. Because legal provisions are often not applied as they should be, laws can end up having little effect – a situation which has long been the case in France. The historian and 19th century political thinker Alexis de Tocqueville once remarked upon this already-established fact, saying: “La regle est rigide, la pratique est molle.”

Judicial review
Score: 8

The Constitutional Council has grown increasingly active in ensuring that French law conforms to the French constitution. If 60 members of parliament or senators call upon the Council to verify the conformity of a law passed by parliament with the constitution, this can potentially lead to the revocation of the law. Research has shown that in more than half of the investigations carried out by the Council, laws or parts of laws have been held not to be in conformity with the constitution – a fact which has resulted in “complaints of unconstitutionality” often being used by the opposition party as a method of control.

A problem linked with judgments made by administrative courts is that they must be implemented by local authorities, which does not always happen. As this has occurred so frequently, the Constitutional Council has set up its own

*Corruption prevention**Score: 7*

committee to deal with such problems.

French bureaucracy is based on a public service ethic that aims to assure that services are available to all citizens equally and in the same form, as well as being corruption-free. This notion can also be witnessed through similar values held internationally. In practice, these principles are not always adhered to in France. This is particularly the case at the local level where there are often conflicts of interest, such as when mayors are bribed during public procurement or construction projects.

Changes in domestic laws resulting from guidelines created by the European Union have not yet brought about the basic changes that were hoped for. Cases of conflict of interest and corruption within local government have been increasingly discussed by the media and public. This indicates an increasing awareness of these problems, which is much greater than during the 1990s.

II. Economic and policy-specific performance

| <i>Basic socioeconomic parameters</i> | <i>score</i> | <i>value</i> | <i>year</i> |
|---------------------------------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|
| GDP p.c. | 4.25 | 30266 \$ | 2005 |
| Potential growth | 2 | 1.8 % | 2008 |
| Unemployment rate | 4.67 | 9.4 % | 2006 |
| Labor force growth | 2.47 | 0.3 % | 2007-2008 |
| Gini coefficient | 8.15 | 0.278 | 2000 |
| Foreign trade | 2.07 | -27.87 | 2005 |
| Inflation rate | 8.37 | 1.5 % | 2007 |
| Real interest rates | 7.81 | 2.7 % | 2007 |

A Economy and employment

Labor market policy

Score: 5

The increasing level of unemployment is a significant issue which all governments have had to face since the 1970s. During the 1990s, various measures, including the introduction of the 35-hour work week and programs targeting the problem of youth unemployment, aimed to reduce the overall level of joblessness. Yet because the employment market in France is one of the most regulated in the whole of Europe, such individual measures have had little effect, despite the large amounts of financial resources invested in them.

A particular problem of the French employment market and its related employment policies is that it fails to integrate certain societal groups. Large sectors of the population, including the young and elderly, are virtually excluded from the labor market.

The new government under Prime Minister François Fillon (since 2007) set out with the promise to render the labor market more flexible, reduce regulations and improve incentives for jobless citizens to actively seek employment. The subsequent protests and the public's insistence on existing welfare state provisions show that the French government will face strong opposition to its reforms, making implementation a questionable goal.

Enterprise policy

Score: 5

The industrial policy of successive French governments has traditionally been limited to the creation and support of internationally competitive “national champions” in the aviation, aerospace, automotive and energy industries. Nationalization of key sectors in the 1970s and re-privatization in the 1980s created an environment in which the private sector lacked the requisite self-confidence in its dealings with the state. The focus on large, internationally competitive champions means the small and medium-sized business sector is not accorded the attention it needs to flourish. The fear of large French companies being taken over by foreign investors has created a sense of “economic patriotism” in recent years, which, in turn, has only exacerbated the gap between large and small businesses.

Tax policy

Score: 4

Like their Scandinavian counterparts, French citizens and businesses carry one of the highest tax burdens of any European country, which limits France's competitiveness internationally. France's tax policy also places an undue burden on certain citizens; approximately 10 percent of taxpayers generate the majority of income tax obtained by the government. Also, taxes in France have continued to increase over the last three decades. Newly introduced taxes such as a "wealth tax" have not been able to contribute to the sustained reduction of France's budget deficit, but have instead exacerbated the growing problem of tax evasion in the country.

Budgetary policy

Score: 4

France's budgetary policy and its high level of public debt are influenced by structural problems which are set to worsen in the future. The dismantling of public services on both the national and local levels in the past has led to poor performance and an inflexible budgetary policy. This has resulted in another break from conformity with the Maastricht criteria and increased observation by other European states of the French government and its president, Nicolas Sarkozy. The most recent attempts made by the French government to decrease the pressure on budgetary consolidation have, until present, been deemed successful by the European Commission and other European Union member states.

B Social affairs

Health policy

Score: 8

The health system in France is available to all societal groups and is valued highly internationally. It is also very expensive: a whopping 10 percent of country's GDP is spent on the health service sector. Measures introduced in recent years to reduce costs, rationalize and increase the efficiency of the French health system have only been partly successful. The increasing expenditure and deficit (a predicted €12 billion in 2007) is seen as a high priority for reform by the current government at the time of writing, and is needed to maintain the high standard of care provided by the current health system.

Social cohesion

Score: 6

Whereas social cohesion policy has played a large role in public debate for several years, the recent spates of social unrest in Parisian suburbs have enhanced public awareness of integration problems. In 2005, a law was created that contained various measures and programs to help combat social exclusion. These measures focused on schooling, access to the job market and equal opportunities in general. Nonetheless, the multitude of single measures has once again meant that financial resources are not applied effectively and efficiently.

Family policy

Score: 9

Highly regarded throughout the world for its generous family support, France's family policy is used as a model by several states in formulating their own policies. In Germany for example, the French model is consistently held up as a standard. The roots of French family policy reach back to the 1930s and 1940s, and successive French governments, irrespective of their ideological orientation, have maintained the pro-family tenor of these policies. France's current high birthrate (relative to other European countries) is considered an indicator of the French system's success.

Thanks to the system, French citizens have appropriate childcare facilities at their disposal, which accounts in part for parents' ability to combine work and family lives more effectively. It is also true, however, that French women are driven to work by financial necessity in supporting their families – a fact that also contributes to the success of French family policy. It should be noted that cultural background and the general concept of "family," which includes grandparents and siblings, help make the financial resources provided by family policy in France appear so successful.

Pension policy

Score: 6

France's pension policy has so far prevented any serious problems of poverty among its elderly citizens. Reforms introduced during the 1990s have not, however, managed to prevent poverty among the elderly, nor have they ensured the financial sustainability of elderly citizens. As a result, several key aims of France's pension policy have not been achieved.

The system, which is based almost exclusively on a "pay as you go" scheme, is

not sustainable. For example, many people in the agricultural or commerce sectors have not been making sufficient contributions over the years to receive a decent pension. Privileges, such as retirement at the age of 50, which is traditionally provided for in public service occupations or other employment sectors, have pushed the pension system to its financial limit. While reform has been placed high on the current government's agenda, public protests point to considerable opposition to change in this area.

C Security and integration policy

Security policy

External security

Score: 9

As a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and as a nuclear power, France belongs to a group of important global players in terms of security. In addition, France's membership in NATO (France is not part of NATO's integrated armed forces) and the European Union (France is increasingly active in EU security policy) has prompted the country to adopt a more supranational point of view. All previous French governments and presidents – irrespective of their political leanings – have expressed a core interest in external security issues.

The parameters of international politics have undoubtedly changed since the end of the Cold War. Nevertheless, the new threat of international terrorism has resulted in France developing its own, independent security policy.

Internal security

Score: 7

The French policy of internal security has focused on areas of unrest within the suburbs of large cities. Social unrest among young people with immigrant backgrounds has drawn increased media coverage and attracted public attention to the policies of the former minister of the interior, as well as the president, Nicolas Sarkozy. There is a debate on whether problems can be better solved by social reform or through police repression.

One particular feature of French internal security policy relates to the fact that France has two types of police: the regular police, which acts as a civil organization, and the gendarmerie, which is a military body.

In summer 2002, a set of comprehensive legal guidelines on inner security (Loi d'orientation et de programmation pour la sécurité intérieure, or LOPSI) came into force, which among other things increased the size of the security forces and reformed the competencies of the police and gendarmerie. Since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, European cooperation in the field of internal security has taken on an increasingly important role.

*New security policy**Score: 8*

France has adapted its security policy to new risks and challenges. In doing so, security authorities have above all increased international cooperation, especially within the European Union. Due in large part to its geographical location, France continues to face several challenges in this regard, such as illegal immigration.

Integration policy*Score: 6*

A policy of multiculturalism is not compatible with the French notion of integration. France's integration policy is determined by the republican principle that everyone born in France automatically becomes a French citizen. Despite restrictions that have been created in recent years, this basic notion has influenced domestic policy toward migrants.

In the last few years, this approach has been successful, as people with immigrant backgrounds have integrated through their experiences in the school system and the employment market. Given the fact that a majority of these immigrants came from French colonies and other European states, this form of integration worked comparatively well.

The situation is different today. The cultural sensitivities of young French citizens with North African backgrounds have been inflamed by the social phenomena of racism and discrimination, resulting in explosive situations in suburban areas with high concentrations of these populations. The Fillon government responded by creating a new ministry that incorporated the concept of "national identity" into its title. In so doing, the French government conceded to a certain extent the limits of the traditional view that those born in France are automatically French citizens.

D Sustainability**Environmental policy***Score: 7*

Despite continued lobbying by environmental groups, France's environmental policy has not played a large role in the public sphere. Apart from some exceptions, the overall state of the environment in France is good, which is attributed primarily to the comparatively (in Europe) low levels of carbon-dioxide emissions within the country (approximately 80 percent of France's energy is created by nuclear energy). A national environmental policy and sustainability plans have thus been developed only recently.

In 2003, a national strategy concerning the environment was established. The Fillon government has also demonstrated that this issue was a high priority by creating a new ministry and organizing expert hearings. The success of these efforts has yet to be identified.

Research and innovation policy

Score: 6

Public funding of research and innovation policy has a significant role in France and explains why, in some areas, French industry is at the forefront of the high-tech sector. Internationally, research policy in France is comparatively weak; this is mainly due to the low level of investment by private industries in research and development. The cooperation between industries and universities is also relatively poor, which helps to explain the small amount of patents registered in France. Deficits in France's research policy go hand-in-hand with its interventionist industrial policy, which has nurtured excellence in state-aided sectors (e.g., armament, aviation, space or transport) but resulted in broad neglect elsewhere.

Education policy

Score: 5

Despite France's comparatively high international ranking in educational matters, there are problems to be addressed by French education policy. The education system in France is highly centrally organized. Although there have been efforts aimed at reforming the school system, each year 60,000 students drop out of secondary schools without having earned a degree, thus facing slim opportunities on the employment market.

French universities have also been suffering for years; despite continued debate, no moves have been made toward reform. High attrition rates among university students constitute another significant problem (up to 50 percent drop out before completing a formal degree). There is also a large discrepancy between top universities, which can compete internationally, and the generally underfinanced and overcrowded universities attended by a majority of the population. The new government at the time of writing is trying to solve this problem by granting universities more autonomy.

The distribution of available funds in the French education system is also unusual compared to other OECD countries. It is one of the few countries where spending per unit for secondary schools is higher than it is for university students. Given the obvious problems with the "underachieving" French university system, the French government seems to be promoting the

implementation of the Bologna process in order to avoid national antagonism and is looking to Europe for help in the matter.

Management Index

I. Executive Capacity

| <i>Cabinet composition</i> | <i>Prime minister</i> | <i>Parties in government</i> | <i>Type</i> | <i>Mode of termination</i> * | <i>Duration</i> |
|----------------------------|-----------------------|------------------------------------|-------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------------|
| | Jean-Pierre Raffarin | Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) | single party government | 2 | 06/02-05/ 05 |
| | Dominique de Villepin | Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) | single party government | 2 | 06/05-05/ 07 |
| | François Fillon | Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) | single party government | - | 05/07- |

* *The following modes of termination should be distinguished: elections = 1; voluntary resignation of the prime minister = 2; resignation of prime minister due to health reasons = 3; dissension within cabinet (coalition breaks up) = 4; lack of parliamentary support = 5; intervention by head of state = 6; broadening of the coalition = 7.*

A Steering capability: preparing and formulating policies

Strategic capacity

Strategic planning
Score: 5

In spite of expert committees' historical tradition in France (for example, the former General Commission of Planning and the current Center for Strategic Analysis or Council of Economic Analysis), their direct influence on government policies and the president are somewhat limited. A visible trend has developed in recent years, in which experts are commissioned on an ad hoc basis to create reports concerning the state of France's economy or its competitiveness to complement official government policy. A central role is assumed by advisers and confidants, who traditionally influence the politics of the president. For years the government and president have conducted

policy in the fields of employment and the domestic budget, a role that has gone against the opinions and analyses of most economists. Strategic planning is also made difficult by the fact that leading up to elections, the wishes of local politicians are carried out at short notice. The observance of election campaigns plays a much more significant role than does strategic political planning.

Scientific advice

Score: 4

Apart from a few exceptions, independent experts do not play a central part in advising the French government and president (exceptions include, as mentioned above, the personal advisors of the president). The influence that economists and think tanks have is also small when compared to other European countries.

This situation stems from the role of the powerful bureaucracy in recruiting the best graduates from the “grandes écoles,” eliminating the need of expert knowledge from outside. Nevertheless, in the recent past, changes to this closed-system have become apparent.

Inter-ministerial coordination

GO expertise

Score: 7

The State Council has a central function in the appraisal of draft (legislative) bills, as every draft proposal is put before the council for approval by the French government. In general, the government usually accepts all suggestions and corrections proposed by the council. If the financial implications of legislative bills need to be evaluated, the Ministry of Finance takes a decisive role in this evaluation.

GO gatekeeping

Score: 9

A clear example of the stark hierarchy within the French political system can be seen in the fact that the Prime Minister’s Office (like the President’s Office) can have a large influence on the content of individual legislative proposals made by ministers.

This form of control is unique when compared to other European countries, with the exception of the British system. If a minister cannot or will not except a proposal made by the Prime Minister’s Office, the only option usually available to the minister in question is to step down.

Line ministries

Score: 9

The political agenda is primarily determined by the prime minister or the president. The government departments generally have to subordinate their wishes to the government agenda, as they have a comparatively limited scope to pursue their own initiatives and political goals.

If departments want to be successful, they have to affiliate themselves with the president’s agenda and coordinate their plans with the President’s Office

or that of the prime minister. If there are conflicts of interest between the Ministry of Finance and other ministries, either the Prime Minister's Office or the prime minister himself must settle the matter.

Cabinet committees

Score: 8

The decisions of high civil servants and ministers are prepared and coordinated in preparatory meetings before cabinet sessions. In practice, this means that several formal or informal meetings (many of them consisting of high civil servants acting on behalf of their ministers) are held to screen and streamline policy proposals before they become public. Only in exceptional cases are matters openly discussed in cabinet sessions; decisions made by the cabinet on measures are a pure formality. The often informal process of approval between ministries and the Prime Minister's Office is hindered by the fact that the president and his office involve themselves to a large extent in this decision process.

Senior ministry officials

Score: 9

The content of cabinet sessions is prepared in great detail by leading civil servants from the individual ministries. The sessions generally allow, as mentioned above, for proposals to be approved only.

Line ministry civil servants

Score: 9

The so-called cabinet of the prime minister is of particular significance in the preparation of sessions and in reaching agreement between ministries. It is made up of a small number of people and experts who are closely linked to and have the complete trust of the prime minister. Cabinet members are responsible for different political areas and serve as competent contact persons for the high civil servants of specific departments. In this way, conflicts can often be successfully solved in preparatory talks. Once again, the Ministry of Finance plays a significant role here, as it is the only department which has veto power.

Regulatory impact assessments

RIA application

Score: 2

France does not have a transparent or public process of regulatory impact assessment, in which all groups affected by legislative proposals are involved. In exceptional circumstances, individual ministries or the Ministry of Finance can request such an assessment.

Needs analysis

Score: 6

A genuine needs analysis, which weighs the advantages and disadvantages of a legislative measure, does not exist. Such an appraisal is necessary according to guidelines set out by the prime minister in 1995. Usually questions concerning the benefit of a legislative initiative are of a general nature and are answered in a formal way, using broad terminology. Both the Constitutional Council as well as State Councils have criticized the use of such "lois bavardes," or talkative laws. In the event that legal provisions and

measures are given a high level of importance by the president or the government, the needs analysis further loses its already low level of significance.

Alternative options

Score: 4

Since 2006, following a directive from the Prime Minister's Office, alternative options and solutions should be discussed when legislative proposals are made. But in reality a minister will often provide colleagues with alternative suggestions during the approval process with attending ministries on tactical reasons. This is because this strategy increases the chances of a ministry being able to keep control of its proposed policy, without new or unwanted ideas being put forward- Quite often, these options serve as a fallback position for a minister when he fails to fully convince colleagues or parliament of his initial proposals. Nevertheless, interest groups such as trade associations present their own, alternative ideas during this informal process and try to influence the government through the public sphere.

Societal consultation

Mobilizing public support

Score: 4

Within a political system, there are numerous committees with representatives who hail from different societal groups and whose task it is to advise the government. Observation, however, has shown that advisory meetings, which have become increasingly important, still have little effect on the government's work. Legislative proposals are often put before parliament by the government and passed without the prior approval of interest groups including, to some extent, trade unions.

As a consequence, large protests do occur, often taking the form of strikes. Strikes have been acknowledged as part of France's political culture, and participation in strikes is a generally accepted form of protest. Experts regularly highlight the fact that France has not yet developed a civil society. The country's culture of protest has the effect that most interest groups complain about the legitimacy of government decision-making when it leads to results that do not fulfill their expectations.

Policy communication

Coherent communication

Score: 8

The strict hierarchical organization of the French government provides for a coherent communication policy, in which individual ministers generally follow or pursue the aims or guidelines of the prime minister or president. This is also built into the structure of the French political system. President

Sarkozy does not take the overall external communications of his government any less seriously than did his predecessors. He has repeatedly criticized numerous ministers, as their public relations work has not fulfilled his expectations.

B Resource efficiency: implementing policies

| | <i>Total</i> | <i>Share</i> |
|--|--------------|--------------|
| <i>Legislative efficiency</i> | | |
| Bills envisaged in the government's work program | 249 | |
| Government-sponsored bills adopted | 227 | 91.16 % |
| <i>Veto players</i> | | |
| Second chamber vetos | 0 | 0 % |
| Head of state vetos | 1 | 6.67 % |
| Court vetos | 23 | 17.97 % |

Effective implementation

Government efficiency
Score: 7

The government's success at being able to achieve its political goals depends on whether the prime minister and president belong to the same political party. The president usually determines the agenda of the government; however, during times of "cohabitation," the president is restricted to his primary tasks, such as formulating foreign and European policy.

When both the prime minister and the president belong to the same party, the success of their aims depends on how smoothly their respective initiatives are coordinated. Prime Minister François Fillon and President Nicolas Sarkozy both started their terms with ambitious reform plans for the French economy and employment market, breaking away from previous government traditions and structures. Nevertheless, previous experience has shown that concerns relating to future elections play an important role in dampening the initial fervor for reform.

Ministerial compliance
Score: 9

Ministers are effectively subordinate to the prime minister (and all are subordinate to the president). This means that, should they wish to stay within the cabinet, ministers generally choose to fully support the government's aims and measures. As there are no coalition governments and no autonomous ministers in France, the political leeway for personal initiatives or non-compliance is small. To date, this has also been the case for the government under Prime Minister François Fillon, in which some

important ministries, including the Ministry of Finance, are led by members of the opposition.

Monitoring line ministries

Score: 9

The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is composed of certain members so as to enable it to effectively control government departments. The expert civil servants in ministries and those in the PMO are in close contact. The Ministry of Finance again takes on an important role here, as it exercises strict financial control on proposed political measures.

Monitoring agencies

Score: 7

The government controls its monitoring agencies. The leaders of these agencies are usually sought and appointed by the Council of Ministers. In exceptional cases, a leader can be appointed through close connections with the prime minister or president. If a leader is appointed in such a way, they possess a higher level of autonomy due to their direct link to the head of government or state.

Task funding

Score: 8

One characteristic of the French political system is that nationally important politicians also often play an important role at the local level. The majority of politicians in Paris also holds positions as local mayors or has significant functions as regional politicians. This plurality of offices leads to the central government paying greater attention to comparatively weaker regions, départements and communes. This is especially so with regard to the transfer of finances from the central government to the periphery.

The Senate serves as a de facto federal chamber, because initiatives proposed by the government in Paris cannot be realized without the Senate's agreement. In this way, the regional and local authorities benefit from financial transfers despite not having their own powers to raise taxes. The support of regional and local areas is generally not linked to political conditions or stipulations.

Constitutional discretion

Score: 5

Despite decentralization which led to the strengthening of regional administrations in the 1980s and in France's status as Europe's classic "central state," the country's central government still has plenty of opportunities to participate in regional politics.

As a result of territorial reform, local government has experienced a political and economic revival, thanks to the veto powers of the Senate and the financial investments of local authorities. Yet again, recent years have shown the central government's repeated success at pursuing a policy of recentralization.

Even though the local authorities are responsible for a large share of public investment, Paris still determines the content of regional and local policies, such as infrastructure projects and vocational training. Despite the fact that

the central government can only contribute a relatively small amount of financial resources as limited by state debt, it can still exert its influence at the regional and local level.

National standards
Score: 8

The goals of presenting an image of a predominantly unified state and offering equal quality of life provisions throughout the country are of particular importance for French public services. French public utilities are either owned by the state, such as the country's rail network, or partly privatized, such as electricity and gas. Water service is maintained by two main companies which own hundreds of local branches. On the whole, the provision of utilities, in accordance with national standards, is regarded as being effective. Nevertheless, the amount of competition between providers could be improved.

C International cooperation: incorporating reform impulses

Domestic adaptability

Domestic adaptability
Score: 8

The interministerial coordination of France's European policy is regarded as the most effective in Europe (with the exception of the United Kingdom), which has often resulted in good cooperation between Paris and Brussels. The reason for this can be traced back to the 1950s with the development of the Secretariat-General of the Interministerial Committee for European Economic Cooperation (SGCI) as a central coordinator of European policy. Under the guidance of the prime minister, an additional committee was set up in 2005 with the aim of reaching a common monthly position regarding negotiations at the European level. Ministers working in the fields of foreign policy, European policy, financial policy and economic policy participate in the committee. Although the process leading to agreement between individual ministers and the president is seen as efficient, the participation of parliament, interest groups and other citizens' groups in influencing French-European policy is in need of reform. The exclusion of such groups can impede the implementation process of EU directives, as important information relating to the implementation process is usually only revealed after a decision has been made by the committee.

External adaptability

International coordination

As one of the most influential European Union member states, France is virtually automatically involved in many EU reform initiatives with an

*activities**Score: 6*

international reach, such as EU climate policy. The French government or president are often involved in the shaping of international policy that relates to French reform projects or fields in which France has previously played an important role, such as security policy. In reality, such efforts have often been met with resistance by other EU member states. France's personnel policy has also been successful in recent years, when it comes to holding top positions within international organizations, such as at the European Central Bank (President Jean-Claude Trichet) or the World Trade Organization (Director-General Pascal Lamy).

*Exporting reforms**Score: 5*

French economic policy has gone against the "mainstream" of international reform policy in recent years. French governments have only tentatively acted in step with EU guidelines. The "French model" is often insisted upon in matters concerning economic and financial policy. This severely limits the possibility of promoting the French model abroad as a success.

For years, the French have tried to relax the rigid regime of the European Stability Pact and have pushed for the politics of the European Central Bank (ECB) to be controlled by an "economic government." The policies of President Nicolas Sarkozy at the time of writing have continued the conflict over this matter with the ECB and other EU member states. French policy in the last years has, at any rate, been more reactive and defensive than it has been proactive. During his election campaign and since taking office during the review period, Sarkozy has tried to have his ideas for EU financial policy reform brought about by using an active, if not activist, approach. Should these attempts prove to be successful (which is at the time of writing not the case) and lead to a change in the ECB's strict policy on monetary stability, the above comments would be rendered moot.

D Institutional learning: structures of self-monitoring and -reform

Organizational reform capacity

*Self-monitoring**Score: 4*

An organized system of self-monitoring can be found in traditional institutions such as the State Council, which in its role as a permanent observer and advisor, also analyses the effects of reform. The existence of such traditional institutions, however, hinders the development of modern agencies which could assume these tasks. Political change in France generally takes place in reaction to public opinion, countrywide protest or as a result of EU reform guidelines; it is much less the result of a self-

*Institutional reform**Score: 6*

monitoring system.

As with other EU member states, reforms in France are often legitimized by a pressure to reform as attributed to international challenges. Many recent reforms in France (such as the introduction of regulatory agencies) were accepted because they proved to be successful in other EU member states or in the United States.

The French political elite has also argued that its political system must be reformed to meet norms and guidelines of the European Union or be able to withstand international competition. Comparing the French system with the best practices and benchmarking of other countries plays a central role in the debate over French reforms. Genuine reforms to increase the strategic capacity of the government (aside from the budgetary law) have not materialized. The current debate is not only concentrated on the government, but also on the strengthening of parliament and the government opposition.

II. Executive accountability

E Citizens: evaluative and participatory competencies

Knowledge of government policy and political attitudes

*Policy knowledge**Score: 7*

The level of knowledge French citizens have on government policy fluctuates and is dependent on social status. During electoral campaigns, or in the run-up to political events such as the referendum on the EU constitution in 2005, citizens are much better informed on individual political positions than they are usually. In these exceptional circumstances, when such themes dominate public debate and media coverage, policy knowledge is at its highest. The Economic and Social Committee in France could have a significant role, as it produces reports and brochures to inform citizens on current political issues. The problem is that these reports are practically unknown. Here, the challenge France has in relating to its central core and periphery is highlighted; the differences in knowledge of people who watch, read and listen to the national Paris media and those who are only informed by regional media should not be understated.

F Parliament: information and control resources

Structures and resources of parliament, committees, parliamentary parties and deputies

| | |
|--|-----|
| Number of deputies | 577 |
| Number of parliamentary committees | 6 |
| Average number of committee members | 96 |
| Average number of subcommittee members | - |
| Pro-government committee chairs appointed | 5 |
| Deputy expert staff size | 4 |
| Total parliamentary group expert support staff | 20 |
| Total parliamentary expert support staff | 390 |

Obtaining documents

Score: 8

In general, the government provides its committees with all requested documents. Exceptions to this rule occur when the government considers their content to be secret or too sensitive to be released to the public. The French parliament has a relatively small number of expert committees. As a result, a number of ad hoc committees and expert groups take over the de facto work from parliamentary committees.

Summoning ministers

Score: 7

Parliamentary committees have the power to summon ministers. Nevertheless, there are often occasions when ministers do not adhere to this. In such instances, ministers can rely on the support of the majority political fraction, whose parliamentary right provides for restrictions in certain cases.

Summoning experts

Score: 10

Parliamentary committees have the right to invite experts and often make use of this right. The use of experts occurs particularly with political themes that have spurred heated debate among the public.

Task area coincidence

Score: 2

The current weak composition of parliamentary committees and their limitation to six committees is a reaction to the strong role that committees had as “mini-parliaments” during the Fourth Republic. To repress this influence, the constitution of the Fifth Republic (since 1958) limited the

number of committees to six, so that the number of ministries considerably exceeds the number of committees. As a result of the excess work associated with this, the possibility of control is significantly limited. In the current debate on parliamentary reform launched by President Sarkozy, an increase in the number of committees is on the agenda.

Audit office

Score: 5

The audit office (Cour de Comptes) is not only responsible for the parliament but also for the executive. It operates as a de facto independent organ, but its investigations and reports have little impact on public debate. This is also currently the case in financial questions or matters, even though the office's reports have repeatedly highlighted the same maladministration and problems over the last four years; matters which have not been taken up by the government or parliament and resolved.

Ombuds office

Score: 1

Neither of the two parliamentary chambers have an ombuds office. Citizens have the right to petition, and do so by submitting petitions to individual parliamentary members. This right is, however, rarely exercised; during the 1997-2002 legislative period, only 31 petitions were submitted.

G Intermediary organizations: professional and advisory capacities

Media, parties and interest associations

Media reporting

Score: 6

Radio and TV stations provide regular, in-depth information which highlights political issues, at least to some extent, although there is a common trend toward reporting on political issues with a focus on "infotainment," so that issues appeal to a broader spectrum of the French public. The permanent coverage of opinion polls in the French media underlines the tendency of political reports to link certain themes and matters to particular persons and their popularity in the public sphere. This trend has been further strengthened under the presidency of Nicolas Sarkozy.

Fragmentation

Parliamentary election results as of 6/16/2002

| <i>Name of party</i> | <i>Acronym</i> | <i>% of votes</i> | <i>% of mandates</i> |
|------------------------------|----------------|-------------------|----------------------|
| Union for a Popular Movement | UMP | 33.4 | 61.53 |
| Socialist Party | PS | 23.8 | 24.26 |
| Democratic Movement | MoDem | 4.8 | 5.02 |
| French Communist Party | PCF | 4.9 | 3.64 |
| Other right-wing parties | | 3.9 | 1.56 |
| Left Radical Party | PRG | 1.5 | 1.21 |
| Other left-wing parties | | 1.4 | 1.04 |
| Greens | VEC | 4.4 | 0.52 |
| Rally for France | RPF | 0.4 | 0.35 |
| Liberal Democracy | DL | 0.4 | 0.35 |
| Independents (2) | | 2.9 | 0.35 |
| Movement for France | MPF | 0.8 | 0.17 |
| National Front | FN | 11.1 | 0 |
| Others | | 6.3 | 0 |

*Party
competence
Score: 5*

The programs of political parties aim to clearly inform voters of party policies. This is the case for both of the country's large socialist parties and the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) party, but it is not the case for extreme political parties. In electoral campaigns, the content of political programs rarely plays a significant role; instead, the individual reputations and image of politicians are what grabs the attention of the electorate. This fact was clearly manifested in the 2007 presidential election. The larger parties use populist elements in their programs, aiming to take away votes from extremist parties. The issue of how election pledges are funded has become a point of discussion and a criterion for the credibility of election programs.

*Association
competence**Score: 4*

Public associations, with the exception of trade unions, play a subordinate role in the French political system. This is, on the one hand, due to the country's political culture which understands public associations as representing particular interests rather than the general welfare of the populace at large. On the other hand, this relative weakness is caused because the majority of fragmented associations, with the exception of some trade unions and specialist groups, do not have the capacity or resources to make substantial reform proposals. The government does not want such organizations to become involved in policy-making. There has been evidence of a change in this position. For example, the French business association MEDEF presented an elaborate reform proposal to the Fillon government.

*Association
relevance**Score: 5*

In the past, there have been traditional affiliations between rightist governments and farmers' and business associations, as well as between leftist governments and trade unions. These affiliations were, however, not incorporated in a system of interest intermediation, pursuant to which the government would listen to public associations and take their interests into consideration. The top organizations that are consulted by the government during deliberations represent only a small percentage of concerned yet independent actors (such as employees), since their numbers are small. The French government gives greater consideration to the proposals of associations and interest groups, as such groups are able to mobilize their supporters and take visible public action, thereby exerting more effective pressure on the government.

This country report is part of the Sustainable Governance Indicators 2009 project, which assesses and compares the reform capacities of the OECD member states.

More on the SGI 2009 at www.sgi-network.org

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