

France



In France, the dictum ‘plus ça change, plus c’est la même chose’ is often applied as much to the country’s politics as to its politicians. More cynical observers go further, ending the dictum: ‘... c’est la même merde (sic)’. In 2013, if things had changed, it certainly wasn’t for the better. At the top of the political tree, in May 2013 – only ten months after his election – President Hollande’s popularity ranking had fallen to 31 per cent, the fastest fall ever recorded by a French president. President Chirac had seen his rating fall to 27 per cent after the failure of the referendum on the European Constitution in 2005 and after four years in office President Sarkozy had dropped to 29 per cent

in April 2011. President Hollande’s fall in popularity was part of a wider process of disillusionment that affected politicians as a whole – the extreme right wing leader Marine le Pen, far from being able to take advantage of the President’s decline, could only muster around the same rating.

The bad news

The Ipsos poll that brought the politicians this worrying information reflected a month of non-stop bad news for France’s beleaguered President. The economy was not even flatlining, the public deficit was increasing as was unemployment, which at 11 per cent was at its highest for the post-war period, with over three million

KEY FACTS

Official name: La République Française (The French Republic)

Head of State: President François Hollande (PS) (from 15 May 2012)

Head of government: Prime Minister Jean-Marc Ayrault (PS) (from 15 May 2012)

Ruling party: Coalition, Majorité présidentielle (presidential majority), led by Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), with Divers Gauche (DVG) (Miscellaneous Leftist), Europe Écologie-Les Verts (EELV) (Europe Ecology-The Greens) and Parti Radical de Gauche (PRG) (Radical Party of the Left) (from 17 Jun 2012)

Area: 543,965 square km

Population: 63.41 million (2012)*

Capital: Paris

Official language: French

Currency: Euro (€) = 100 cents (from 1 Jan 2002; previous currency French franc, locked at Ff6.56 per euro)

Exchange rate: €0.75 per US\$ (Jul 2013)

GDP per capita: US\$41,141 (2012)*

GDP real growth: 0.03% (2012)*

GDP: US\$2,608.70 billion (2012)*

Labour force: 28.27 million (2009)

Unemployment: 10.22% (2012)*

Inflation: 1.98% (2012)*

Balance of trade: -US\$88.11 billion (2011)

* estimated figure

unemployed, close to the historical record set in 1997 (3,195,000). There were other, more localised contributory factors to the national malaise, such as the controversial increase in diesel fuel tax. Pierre Moscovici, France's minister of economy, saw his popularity drop by five points to 29 per cent, the inevitable result of being unfairly depicted as the Austerity Minister. The boost that President Hollande had received as a result of the, more-or-less successful, French military intervention in Mali proved short-lived. Among professional people the President's popularity held up better, at 36.2 per cent. But among those employed in the public sector, the prospects of further budget cuts resulted in a nine per cent drop, only beaten by France's struggling working class, where the President's popularity fell by 11 percentage points, to 27 per cent. Among members of the Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), the President inevitably fared better with a rating of 67 per cent, still his lowest since May 2012.

Other polls showed French support for the European Union (EU) crumbling. In mid-2012 support for EU membership was around the 60 per cent mark; a year later it had slumped by almost 20 per cent, to only 41 per cent, lower than the corresponding figure in the reportedly Eurosceptic United Kingdom (UK). The same polls suggested that France's backbone, the middle class, was becoming a less significant social force. One report indicated that only 48 per cent of the population considered themselves to be middle

class, down from the 52 per cent recorded in 2010. The number who considered themselves to be working class had, conversely, grown from 29 per cent to 33 per cent. Middle class fears centred on a perceived drop in living standards – to levels below those once enjoyed by their parents and of seeing their children stuck on a social ladder they were unable to climb. A report prepared by an organisation sympathetic to the ruling PS pinpointed two acute problems confronting the government – one was the number of French professionals seeking employment elsewhere. A report by the BBC in London claimed that more French people – some 400,000 – live in London than in Bordeaux, Nantes or Strasbourg, and London could almost be regarded as France's sixth biggest city in terms of population. The other serious problem was the disturbing statistic that some eight million individuals were now affected by poverty. The ability to save money also appeared to have been eroded: 53 per cent of the French adult population in 2013 were unable to save anything at the end of the month, seven per cent more than the 46 per cent affected in 2010. Those complaining of a straightforward difficulty to make ends meet had risen from 36 per cent in 2010 to 44 per cent.

The stuttering economy

In its annual review of the French economy, the Paris based Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) notes that France has been hit hard by the global recession and, more

recently, by turmoil in the euro-zone. As confidence recovers, activity should pick up gradually and the unemployment rate stabilise in late 2013. Yet, in the view of the OECD, France faces serious long-term challenges. The political timetable (the next general election is not until 2016, and the next presidential in 2017) offers a unique opportunity to implement an ambitious strategy of reforms to make government less costly and more effective and to raise employment among the over-sixties and improve the prospects of the young. Recent adoption of the employment competitiveness tax credit and the labour market agreement between social partners send encouraging signals, noted the OECD, although the functioning of the labour market needs to be further improved. Greater competition in services and rationalisation of housing policies are crucial reforms required to boost purchasing power, create jobs and enhance competitiveness.

Fiscal consolidation remains a priority for the French government. Recent governments have shown laudable determination to restore public finances to good health following decades of rising public indebtedness. Deficit reduction efforts need to continue as planned, recommends the OECD, while letting automatic stabilisers operate fully. Public spending is very high as a percentage of gross domestic product (GDP) and needs to be reduced over time to ease the tax burden in the medium term.

In mid-2013 the EU in Brussels agreed to give France two more years to meet the budget deficit targets established in agreement with the other euro-zone members (the seventeen countries that use the euro as their currency). The 2013 budget deficit looks like reaching 3.7 per cent of GDP, well above the 3 per cent target. France needs to cut Europe's highest public spending and deregulate the labour market. To its embarrassment France was becoming the subject of concerns in Brussels that it risked becoming a 'failed' economy. José Manuel Barroso, the head of the European Commission, adopted a critical position saying that 'The truth is that France has lost competitiveness over the past 20 years. This is a problem that has to be addressed in a courageous fashion.'

Such was the scarcity of good news that Mr Hollande, very much on the back foot, found himself clutching at economic straws. Thus the President was quick to identify himself with a photo call to celebrate a contract for 234 aircraft won by the

KEY INDICATORS

France

	Unit	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012
Population	m	62.30	62.64	62.80	63.09	*63.41
Gross domestic product (GDP)	US\$bn	2,866.80	2,675.90	2,582.50	2,776.30	*2,608.70
GDP per capita	US\$	46,035	42,747	41,019	44,008	*41,141
GDP real growth	%	0.3	-2.5	1.4	1.7	*0.0
Inflation	%	3.2	0.1	1.7	2.3	*2.0
Unemployment	%	7.4	9.5	9.4	9.2	*10.2
Coal output	mtoe	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1	0.1
Exports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	601,850.0	473,860.0	517,150.0	593,510.0	–
Imports (fob) (goods)	US\$m	691,990.0	535,830.0	588,360.0	681,620.0	*46,343.0
Balance of trade	US\$m	-90,150.0	-61,960.0	-71,210.0	-88,110.0	*-7,607.0
Current account	US\$m	-64,776.0	-51,860.0	-44,500.0	-54,169.0	*-62,893.0
Total reserves minus gold	US\$m	33,617.0	46,633.0	55,800.0	59,530.0	*54,231.0
Foreign exchange	US\$m	30,382.0	27,729.0	36,211.0	37,206.0	*30,350.0
Exchange rate	per US\$	0.68	0.73	0.76	0.75	*0.77

* estimated figure

European Airbus consortium. The fact that the French government had played no role in the deal and that Airbus was not even a truly French company was temporarily overlooked. A two day public relations initiative in Burgundy aimed at identifying the President with his electorate failed miserably as Mr Hollande faced noisy protest groups that drowned his speeches with shouts and whistles. Mr Hollande had known that his post electoral period would not be easy; that would be the case whatever the political complexion of the President. But after less than a year in office, the reality was worse than anything he could have imagined. At the heart of his unpopularity was the continued deterioration of the economic situation. The GDP growth that the President had counted on seeing in 2013 – a modest 0.8 per cent – had vanished. Mr Hollande was, after all, a President from the social democratic, reformist tradition. He had never intended to be a *laissez faire* president; on the contrary, he had been set on introducing rigorous economic management. Instead, much of his unpopularity was prompted by the people's inability to distinguish between the policies of Hollande and those of his predecessor, Nicolas Sarkozy.

The International Monetary Fund's (IMF) August 2013 annual assessment of the French economy predicted that the economy would contract by 0.2 per cent in 2013 and grow by 0.8 per cent in 2014. Weak conditions in Europe, low confidence and measures to reduce the government deficit over the past two years had dampened growth. The slow pace of reforms to make the labour and product markets more competitive has also undermined the economy's potential to grow and decreased competitiveness in export markets.

According to the IMF, the French government has begun to address these challenges and has given structural reforms an important forward momentum with measures to reduce the payroll taxes, give enterprises greater flexibility to adjust wages and working hours while reinforcing job security. Attention has also been given to improve job training and to simplify government regulations. The IMF also considered it important that combined with these reforms, an opening of product markets to greater competition, notably in the more protected services sector, would be an important lever of productivity growth and employment creation for the economy.

By the end of 2013, according to the IMF the French government will have

completed two-thirds of the effort that began in 2011 to bring deficits to a stable position. Given this track record and the still hesitant recovery, in the view of the IMF the French government should ease the pace of adjustment. At the same time, the government needs to rebalance efforts and reduce spending rather than increase taxes, which are high by international standards and adversely affect investment and job creation.

Large and internationally interconnected French banks have made significant progress to strengthen their balance sheets, all the while preserving their capacity to lend to the economy. Financial stability is stronger but the French financial system still needs to adapt fully to new international prudential requirements, notably in terms of funding structures.

Defence spending

Despite making cuts in its defence forces, the French government under President Hollande seems set on maintaining its international role as a military power. Under Sarkozy France had played a significant role, alongside its North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) partner the UK, in ridding Libya of the Qaddafi regime. Under Hollande it had boldly taken the lead in ridding Mali of a major armed Islamist threat. The Hollande administration's military plans were eventually set out in a lengthy defence White Paper; between 2014 and 2019 France's armed forces are to be reduced by 34,000 personnel, from the 2013 establishment of 218,000, a figure which already reflects a reduction by 40,000 since 2008. In real terms, defence spending would be held at €179 billion (US\$238.7 billion), 1.56 per cent of GDP. This amounted to an annual freeze of €31 billion (US\$41.3 billion). At the end of the Cold War, in 1990, defence spending amounted to 3 per cent of GDP.

Alongside the UK, with which it co-operates closely, France is the largest European military power. The White Paper was designed to maintain this position, while confirming France's role in NATO. Under Sarkozy France had returned to NATO after an absence of some 40 years. The history of France's relationship with the treaty provides an interesting insight into the post-war French psyche. In 1958 General de Gaulle, continuing his obsession with Anglo-Saxon domination, had complained that the United States' predominant role in the organisation and the special relationship that appeared to operate between the US and the UK put France

at a disadvantage. In a memorandum he argued for the creation of a new tripartite directorate designed to put France on an equal footing with the US and the UK. Characteristically, de Gaulle had failed to take into account the views of NATO's other members. Rebuffed, de Gaulle decided to create an independent French *force de frappe* (strike force). In early 1959, France withdrew its Mediterranean Fleet from NATO command. He later banned the positioning of NATO (i.e. non-French) nuclear weapons on French soil. So it was that by 1967 the US military had left France and the bases they had used since 1950 reverted to France. In 1966, all French armed forces had been removed from NATO's command and all non-French NATO troops left France. France continued to be a 'non-playing' member of the alliance, with its own forces stationed in West Germany until the end of the Cold War. It later emerged that a number of secret agreements had been drawn up to provide for French re-integration into NATO in the event of war between NATO and the Warsaw Pact countries.

The 2013 White Paper certainly impinged on France's NATO commitment. According to the London *Financial Times* (FT) the total number of French troops deployable would fall from 80,000 to 66,000 and France's capacity for participating in any prolonged NATO operation would be halved, from 30,000 troops to 15,000. The personnel shortfall was to be compensated for by drone purchases and more transport and refuelling aircraft. The single caveat surrounding the defence White Paper was whether, when push came to shove, the funds set out would actually be forthcoming. To complicate matters further, the FT reported that senior directors of a number of major defence contractors had written to President Hollande warning him of the likely effect of defence cuts on France's growing numbers of unemployed.

Unemployment

French schools have long been regarded with envy by the rest of Europe. Progress from the *Maternelle* (kindergarten) to the *Lycée* (grammar school) has been geared to producing numerate and literate youngsters from which will be chosen an exceptional elite who will run the country, either in Paris or throughout the uniform structures of the *Préfectures*. To follow the *Lycées*, France had created a system of excellent, albeit small, *grandes écoles*, designed simply to educate its future business and political leaders. The *grandes*

écoles were certainly to be envied; however, that was not the case with the educational system that sits alongside them. Often overcrowded universities have unacceptably high drop-out rates. That is because effectively there is no selection system – in principle any pupil who has passed the *Baccalauréat* examination can claim a university place. The French ministry of education’s website boldly states that the examination has ‘the dual purpose of confirming the satisfactory completion of secondary education and of opening up higher education’. It represents the first university grade. However, less than 40 per cent of undergraduates get their degrees in four years. Sadly, the correlation between school performance and household income is just as bad as it is in the UK or even the US.

The current global crisis has extracted a heavy toll on France’s young people. Between 2007 and 2010, the drop in employment rates in the 15–24 age group in the EU was eight times higher than in the 15–64 age group. In France, youth unemployment reached 23.8 per cent in December 2011 (22.1 per cent on average in the EU) whereas unemployment for the entire active population was 9.9 per cent, roughly equal to that of the EU according to Eurostat figures. The economic crisis appears to have simply amplified what has become a quasi-structural phenomenon: in the previous 30 years, France’s youth unemployment rate had never fallen below 15 per cent and had regularly exceeded 20 per cent. Nevertheless, youth integration into the labour market has been a continuing public policy objective for French governments since the end of the 1970s. It is impossible to study the problems confronting France’s young people without referring to the plethora of largely unsuccessful public measures. The official figures also disguised the real situation. At the end of 2010, 665,000 young people were benefiting from government subsidised work contracts (*contrats aidés*) – close to one-quarter of the under-26 age group, compared to the 4 per cent of the entire active population that were similarly employed.

Risk assessment

Politics	Fair
Economy	Poor
Regional stability	Good

COUNTRY PROFILE

Historical profile

1337–1453 The Hundred Years’ War took place between the English and the

French. The English were defeated in 1453 and driven out of Aquitaine in southern France.

1789 The lack of representation for the increasingly powerful middle class, opposition to France’s absolute monarchy and economic problems led to the French Revolution and the overthrow of Louis XVI.

1792 The First Republic was declared.

1804 Napoléon Bonaparte declared himself emperor and launched a military campaign in Europe.

1815 Napoléon’s defeat at Waterloo by the British, Belgians, Dutch and Prussians saw the end of his reign. Louis XVIII became King of France.

1848 An uprising led by students and workers, although quickly crushed, again led to the overthrow of the monarchy.

Louis Napoléon (nephew of the first Napoléon) was elected president.

1852 Louis Napoléon declared himself emperor.

1871 France’s defeat in the Franco-Prussian War resulted in the annexation of Alsace-Lorraine by the Germans.

1914 France was invaded by Germany.

1918 Following the end of the First World War and Germany’s defeat, France regained Alsace-Lorraine.

1939 After Germany’s invasion of Poland, France and the UK entered the Second World War by declaring war on Germany.

1940 France signed an armistice after Germany had invaded the country. The Germans installed a puppet government, the Vichy, led by Henri-Philippe Pétain. A Free French resistance built up in the UK under the leadership of General Charles de Gaulle.

1944 Following the liberation of France by the Allied powers, a provisional government took office under General de Gaulle.

1945 After the war in Europe General de Gaulle retired from public office. The Fourth Republic was created with a constitution giving ultimate power to the Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly).

1946–1958 France had 26 different governments, many including large communist elements.

1958 The Fifth Republic was created after the introduction of a new constitution, which allowed for the creation of a powerful presidency. General de Gaulle was elected president. France became a founder member of the forerunner of the EU, the European Economic Community (EEC), along with Belgium, Italy, Luxembourg, The Netherlands and West Germany.

1962 Algeria, which had been a *département* of France since 1948, gained its independence, following a brutal insurgency.

1968 Discontent with low wages, lack of social reform and poor education policies led to a revolt by students and workers.

The general strike was settled by the granting of generous wage rises and the student revolt collapsed, although De Gaulle’s political position was fatally weakened.

1969 De Gaulle resigned from the presidency after losing a referendum on his programme for strengthening regional governments. He was succeeded by Georges Pompidou (1969–74) who was followed by Valéry Giscard d’Estaing (1974–81).

1970 Former president Charles de Gaulle died.

1981 François Mitterrand became the first socialist president since 1958 following Giscard d’Estaing’s electoral defeat, governing with the first left-wing cabinet for 23 years.

1995 Jacques Chirac succeeded François Mitterrand as president. Pacific and Oceania countries condemned French nuclear testing in French Polynesia.

2002 The euro replaced the franc as France’s currency. President Chirac defeated Jean-Marie Le Pen in elections. Prime Minister Lionel Jospin resigned and Chirac appointed Jean-Pierre Raffarin (UMP) in his place. After legislative elections, a coalition government was formed, led by the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) (Popular Movement Party), with Union pour la Démocratie Française (UDF) (French Democracy Party), the Démocratie Libérale (DL) (Liberal Democracy) and allies.

2003 France was crippled by a series of public sector strikes over pension reform.

2004 Voting in regional elections showed national discontent with the government, as the left-wing opposition carried 21 out of the country’s 22 mainland regions.

Prime Minister Raffarin resigned, but was immediately re-instated.

2005 France held a referendum on the European Constitution in which almost 55 per cent voted No, with 45 per cent in favour; turnout was about 70 per cent.

Prime Minister Raffarin resigned the next day; Dominique de Villepin was appointed prime minister. Rioting in disadvantaged and disaffected immigrant communities broke out, first in the Paris suburb of Clichy-sous-Bois, then elsewhere in the capital and in other towns and cities. Final figures reported by the French police were 8,973 vehicles burnt and 2,888 arrests forcing the government to declare a state of emergency for several weeks.

2006 France provided 1,700 troops for UN peace-keeping duties in the Lebanon. France and Germany combined to apply pressure on the EU demanding tougher

conditions for Turkey's proposed membership.

2007 Nicolas Sarkozy (Rassemblement pour la République (RPR) (Party of the Republic)), won the presidential elections, defeating Ségolène Royal (Parti Socialiste (PS) Socialist Party)). François Fillon (UMP) was appointed prime minister.

2008 Société Générale, one of France's largest banks, lost US\$7.1 billion through fraud by a rogue trader. President Sarkozy married Carla Bruni at the Elysée Palace. Parliament scrapped the 35-hour working week, 10 years after it was introduced, so that companies could organise working patterns based on agreements with their workforces.

2009 An economic stimulus package of US\$33.1 billion was launched. The Natixis corporate and investment bank declared it had 'toxic assets' of US\$44 billion and losses of US\$2.8 billion in the first quarter of the year.

2010 The burka (full Islamic face veil worn by women) was banned in France. The penalties for wearing a burka or forcing a female to wear a burka include fines and imprisonment. Over three million French protestors took part in marches and widespread strikes, called to object to government plans to increase the age of retirement from 60 to 62 years by 2018.

2011 In March, France became the first country to formally recognise the Libyan Transitional National Council (TNC) as the legitimate government of Libya. It joined a five-country coalition (with Canada, Italy, the UK and the US) to impose a no-fly zone over Libya. In March a referendum was held in Mayotte to decide whether it should become a French Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM) (Overseas Department). The result was 95.24 per cent of votes in favour. The island of Mayotte became France's fifth DOM.

Comoros, which claimed the territory, protested the action of France. In June, the French finance minister, Christine Lagarde was appointed as managing director of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and took up her post in July. In June a supply of weapons (including assault rifles, machine guns and rocket launchers) was parachuted into rebel held territory of Libya by the French military. The African Union condemned the move saying it puts the whole region at risk. The French stated that this was a one-off decision to re-arm a town cut off from supplies from its allies. In an unannounced visit to Afghanistan in July President Sarkozy announced that 1,000 French troops would be withdrawn by the end of 2012. In indirect elections held in September the left wing Socialist Party and its Communist and Green allies won enough seats to win control of the upper house

(Senate). The conservatives had held power in the Senate since the formation of the Fifth Republic in 1958. 200 French troops that were part of a 4,000 military contingent stationed in the district of Surobi and the neighbouring Kapisa Province, were withdrawn from active service in the NATO mission in Afghanistan in October. In November, France announced that it would no longer buy Iranian oil, typically amounting to 49,000 barrels per day, on a 'national basis'. The French ban was in response to Iran's continued nuclear programme. France also joined its EU partners in joint sanctions.

2012 On February 15 President Sarkozy formally declared he would stand for re-election in the presidential polls. The first round was held on 22 April, in which 10 candidates took part. Incumbent Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) won 27.18 per cent of the vote but his chief rival François Hollande (PS) won 28.63 per cent. The runoff was held on 6 May, in which the socialist candidate, François Hollande won 51.63 per cent of the vote and Nicolas Sarkozy 48.37 per cent; turnout was 80.35 per cent. On 16 May President Hollande appointed Jean-Marc Ayrault as prime minister; Ayrault immediately appointed his cabinet. On 10 July, 200 NATO troops began the phased withdrawal of French forces from Afghanistan; with completion scheduled for December. After two rounds of parliamentary elections, held on 10 and 17 June, the socialist coalition of four parties supporting President Hollande, led by PS, won a total of 57.7 per cent of the vote (331 seats out of 577). The opposition Droite parlementaire (Parliamentary Right) coalition of five parties, led by UMP, won 39.7 per cent (229). On 25 June the socialist government restored the official age of retirement to 60 years. On 28 August, a murder inquiry into the death of Palestine and Fatah leader, Yasser Arafat, was opened by French investigators. Arafat had died in a French military hospital and his family claimed the poison polonium-210 had been used to kill him. On 17 October, President Hollande acknowledged that Algerians had been massacred by the police force during and Algerian independence rally in Paris in 1961; saying 'I pay homage to (the) victims fifty-one years later'. On 16 November the credit ratings agency Moody's downgraded France from an AAA rating to AA1; Moody's also retained the negative outlook, which was a warning that France could be downgraded again.

2013 On 2 September Prime Minister Ayrault presented a report to parliament which reported that the chemical attack in the outskirts of Damascus on 21 August 'could not have been ordered and carried

out by anyone but the Syrian government' and that it involved a 'massive use of chemical agents'.

Political structure

Constitution

The 25 September 1958 constitution of the Fifth Republic maintained the original French republican ideals of liberty, fraternity and equality. It was designed to end post-war political deadlock by granting greater powers to the president. It guarantees the unity and indivisibility of the French state.

Since 1982 much administrative and financial power, traditionally held by the state, has been devolved to the 22 *régions* (regions) and 96 *départements* (departments) of metropolitan France. In March 2003, parliament approved constitutional amendments which allow all of the regions and departments a greater amount of autonomy.

In mid-2000, legislation was passed granting semi-autonomy to the island of Corsica as a single administrative unit, replacing its previous status as two standard *départements*. France's overseas territories are either classed as Département d'Outre-Mer (DOM) (Overseas Department) or Territoire d'Outre-Mer (TOM) (Overseas Territory), depending on the level of autonomy.

Independence date

14 July 1789.

Form of state

Semi-presidential democratic republic

The executive

Executive power is held by the president, elected by universal adult suffrage for a five-year term which can be renewed only once. A two-round voting system operates for presidential elections, with the second round a run-off between the two highest polling candidates from the first round. The president appoints the prime minister and other members of the government, can dissolve the Assemblée Nationale and can also veto laws. In practice, the president traditionally accepts as prime minister the leader of the largest party in the National Assembly, and approves the prime minister's choice of government ministers.

The presidential term of office was reduced from seven years to five with effect from the 2002 presidential elections.

National legislature

The bicameral Parlement (Parliament) consists of the Assemblée Nationale (National Assembly) with 577 députés (deputies) directly elected in single seat constituencies, for five-year terms. The Sénat (Senate) has 321 seats in total, of which 304 are elected for six-year terms by an electoral college of elected representatives from each department; the

remainder are elected by overseas regions, departments, collectivities and territories.

Legal system

The country has no supreme court but this role is filled by a nine-member Conseil Constitutionnel (Constitutional Council). Its task is to ensure that law treaties and regulations are in keeping with the constitution and that elections are conducted in a regular manner. The highest court of appeal is the Cour de Cassation, which can overrule decisions in all lower courts, but not government legislation. Since the signing of the Single European Act in 1986, the European Court of Justice (ECJ) has been the highest authority in certain areas of French law. France also accepts International Court of Justice (ICJ) jurisdiction.

Last elections

10 and 17 June 2012 (parliamentary); 22 April and 6 May 2012 (presidential first round and runoff)

Results: Parliamentary: Majorité présidentielle (Presidential Majority) coalition of four parties led by Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), won a total of 57.7 per cent of the vote (331 seats, out of 577), Droite parlementaire (Parliamentary Right) coalition of five parties, led by Union pour un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) (Union for a Popular Movement) won 39.7 per cent (229), five other political parties won the remaining 17 seats. Turnout was 55.4 per cent.

Presidential (first round): François Hollande (PS) won 28.63 per cent of the vote, Nicolas Sarkozy (UMP) 27.18 per cent, Marine Le Pen (Front National (FN) (National Front)) 17.9 per cent, Jean-Luc Mélenchon (Front de Gauche (FG) (Left Front)) 11.1 per cent, François Bayrou (Mouvement Démocrate (MD) (Democratic Movement)) 9.13 per cent; five other candidates each won less than 3 per cent of the vote. Turnout was 79.5 per cent. Runoff: Hollande won 51.63 per cent of the vote, Sarkozy 48.37 per cent; turnout was 80.35 per cent.

Next elections

June 2016 (parliamentary); April/May 2017 (presidential)

Political parties

Ruling party

Coalition, Majorité présidentielle (presidential majority), led by Parti Socialiste (PS) (Socialist Party), with Divers Gauche (DVG) (Miscellaneous Leftist), Europe Écologie-Les Verts (EELV) (Europe Ecology-The Greens) and Parti Radical de Gauche (PRG) (Radical Party of the Left) (from 17 Jun 2012)

Main opposition party

Droite parlementaire (parliamentary right) coalition of five parties, led by Union pour

un Mouvement Populaire (UMP) (Union for a Popular Movement)

Population

63.41 million (2012)*

Last census: 1 January 2006:

61,399,541

Population density: 107 inhabitants per square km. Urban population 85 per cent (2010 Unicef).

Annual growth rate: 0.5 per cent, 1990–2010 (Unicef).

Ethnic make-up

The population is predominantly Western European. North Africans form the principal ethnic minority, with smaller communities from former French colonies in Asia and sub-Saharan Africa.

Religions

There is no state religion, but Roman Catholicism predominates (90 per cent of population), with a significant Protestant minority concentrated in southern France (2 per cent) and Muslim and Jewish communities in major urban areas (1 per cent each).

Education

Compulsory education is provided for free. Primary schooling lasts to the age of 11, after which all pupils transfer to a four-year course in secondary school. At the age of 15 there are two options: either a three-year course leading to the *baccalauréate* examination or a two-year vocational course. An average of 80 per cent of schoolchildren are expected to achieve the *baccalauréate*, which is the minimum entry qualification to university. Educational expenditure is typically equivalent to 6 per cent of gross national income.

Compulsory years: Six to 16

Pupils per teacher: 19 in primary schools

Health

France's liberal state-subsidised medical system allows doctors and dentists to establish private practices. Patients, who are free to choose their own providers, are reimbursed by the state for up to 85 per cent of medical costs. The government makes full provision for people who are unable to make any contributions, by treating them as private patients covered by insurance.

Proposed reforms to reduce the cost of the health system have met with vociferous opposition from doctors, nurses and health professionals. Fraud is estimated to cost the system more than US\$980 million per year, and ease of access to prescription drugs is thought to be the principal reason for the fact that French consumption of drugs and medicine is more than three times the European average.

HIV/Aids

HIV prevalence: 0.4 per cent aged 15–49 in 2003 (World Bank)

Life expectancy: 80 years, 2004 (WHO 2006)

Fertility rate/Maternal mortality rate: 2.0 births per woman, 2010 (Unicef); maternal mortality 0.1 per 1,000 live births (World Bank).

Child (under 5 years) mortality rate (per 1,000): 4 per 1,000 live births (WHO 2012)

Head of population per physician: 3.37 physicians per 1,000 people, 2004 (WHO 2006)

Welfare

France's extensive social security system, including health insurance, family allowances and retirement insurance, covers 99.2 per cent of the population. In common with other industrialised nations, France's ageing population is an increasing concern.

In June 2012, the new government announced plans to reverse the previous government's controversial introduction of a raised retirement age from 60 to 62 years, the proposal should benefit around 110,000 public servants.

Pensions

In June 2010, pension reforms were introduced, to be implemented by 2012, including raising the retirement age from 60 to 62, with workers having worked for a minimum of 41.5 years. France's pension deficit for 2010 was estimated at US\$39.5 billion and could treble by 2050 if measures to stem the costs are not employed.

Main cities

Paris (capital, estimated population 2.2 million in 2012), Marseille (795,600), Lyon (495,840), Toulouse (469,854), Nice (329,311), Nantes (283,226), Strasbourg (282,496), Lille (273,168), Montpellier (266,645), Bordeaux (229,500).

Languages spoken

Breton is spoken in Brittany and Euskera (Basque) is spoken in the south-west, while in Alsace and Lorraine, in the east, German is widely spoken.

English is spoken in the business community, but an understanding of French is considered essential for visitors. Flemish, Catalán, Occitan, Corsu, Arabic, Kabyle and Antillean are also spoken.

Official language/s

French

Media

Press

French newspapers are editorially free from government control and censorship, and cover the full political spectrum. There are 85 daily newspapers published,

of which 24 are nationals. There are around 870 newspapers and 6,000 magazines published reaching over 45 per cent of adults. Regional newspapers have a larger readership than national titles.

Dailies: In French, major newspapers include *Le Monde* (www.lemonde.fr), *Le Figaro* (www.lefigaro.fr) is a conservative newspaper, *Libération* (www.liberation.fr) a left-wing newspaper, *Ouest France* (www.ouest-france.fr) has the largest circulation, *Le Parisien* (www.leparisien.fr) a centrist newspaper and *La Croix* (www.la-croix.com) a Catholic newspaper.

Weeklies: In French, the *Courrier International* (www.courrierinternational.com), *L'Express* (www.lexpress.fr) and *Le Point* (www.lepoint.fr) report on news and current affairs, *Le Journal du Dimanche* (www.lejdd.fr) is a popular Sunday newspaper. Special interest publications include *Maghreb Hebdo* concerning north African news and *La Marseillaise* a communist publication and two humourist magazines are *Le Canard Enchaîné* and *Le Herisson*. In English *The Riviera Times* (www.rivieratimes.com).

Business: In French, daily newspapers include *Les Echos* (www.lesechos.fr), *La Tribune* (www.latribune.fr) and *Investir* (www.investir.fr). Monthly publications include the popular economics magazine *Capital* (www.capital.fr), *L'Expansion* (www.lexpansion.com) and *Valeurs Actuelles* (www.valeursactuelles.com) a weekly and *Le Revenu* (www.lerevenu.com) a bi-weekly magazine. *Jeune Afrique Economie* is an Africa-oriented bi-weekly.

Periodicals: In French, monthly publications include *Le Monde Diplomatique* (www.monde-diplomatique.fr) a left-wing magazine, *Entrevue* (www.entrevue.fr) a tabloid entertainment magazine, *Lire* (www.lire.fr) a cultural magazine and *Le Nouvel Afrique Asie* a left-wing third world-orientated monthly magazine. Influential women's magazines include *Vogue* (www.vogue.fr) and *Marie Claire* (www.marieclaire.fr).

Broadcasting

France is a world leader in broadcasting, providing international news and entertainment services to most continents, via radio, satellite, pay-to-view digital services and internet links.

Radio: The national public radio service is Radio France (www.radiofrance.fr) with seven stations offering a range of genre including classical, news, sport, information, culture and modern music. Radio France Internationale (RFI) (www.rfi.fr) is funded wholly by the French ministry of foreign affairs; it broadcasts worldwide in 19 languages, other than French.

Nationally, there are 17 commercial radio stations including Europe 1 (www.europe1.fr), Fun Radio (www.funradio.fr), RTL (www.rtl.fr) a major news and entertainment network, Sud Radio (www.sudradio.fr), NRJ (www.nrj.fr), a leading music network and Alouette (www.alouette.fr).

Apart from private local and regional radio stations, many are affiliates of national networks.

Television: The national public broadcaster is France Télévisions (www.francetelevisions.fr) with five networks. Some channels carry advertising. Channels are designated France 2, 3, 4, 5 and RFO (www.rfo.fr) for overseas territories. Combined, France Télévisions typically has 40 per cent of the audience share and 30 per cent of revenues.

TF1 (www.tf1.fr) is the leading commercial TV channel with typically 35 per cent audience share and almost 50 per cent of advertising revenues. Programmes include locally made and foreign imports. TFI operates a national 24-hour news channel, La Chaîne Info (<http://tf1.lci.fr>), as well as a major digital and internet TV service, France 24 (www.france24.com), with a wide range of international news and current affairs in French, English and Arabic. All analogue services will be switched to digital services by 2011.

National news agency: Agence France Presse

Other news agencies: Reuters:

<http://fr.reuters.com>

Focus: www.focusinfo.eu

Economy

The French economy, following on after Germany and the UK, is Europe and the EU's most productive economy. It manufactures some of the biggest global brands of automobiles and luxury goods, space technology and heavy machinery, pharmaceuticals and construction materials, foodstuffs and cultural items. It is a major exporter of energy, particularly electricity from its network of nuclear power stations and it was reported in 2010 that it had three of the world's top-ten largest banks, operating worldwide.

GDP growth in 2007 was 2.3 per cent, which fell to 0.3 per cent in 2008 as the global economic crisis struck; the trade deficit was 37 per cent higher than in 2007, at US\$71.4 billion, due to record high petroleum prices coupled with weakened export trade. The financial sector was caught up in the US mortgage-based toxic debt, which caused the economy to fall further to -2.2 per cent in 2009, so that France officially fell into recession in the first quarter of 2009. The government was forced to bail out six of the country's

banks at the cost of US\$14 billion to its taxpayers. At the same time as the global banking system was going into meltdown a trader working for Société Générale lost US\$7.2 billion of the bank's money by speculating on the stock market through bogus transactions. It was the largest loss in France's corporate history and resulted in the bank being downgraded by two international credit ratings agencies.

On 16 November 2012 the credit ratings agency Moody's downgraded France from an AAA rating to AA1; Moody's also retained the negative outlook, which was a warning that France could be downgraded again. The loss of the triple rating was due to 'persistent structural economic challenges', economic growth that has stalled, the weakness in the euro-zone caused by the Greek economy and France's obligation in bailing out other economies.

Some much-needed reforms, notably in pensions, were begun in June 2010. They included raising the retirement age from 60 to 62, to be implemented by 2012; workers will also have to have worked for a minimum of 41.5 years. France's pension deficit for 2010 was estimated at US\$39.5 billion and could treble by 2050 if measures to stem the costs are not employed. Another major priority for the government continues to be unemployment, which is around 10 per cent and, more worryingly, with disproportionately high youth unemployment.

External trade

As a member of the European Union, France operates within a community-wide free trade area, with tariffs set as a whole. Internationally, the EU has free trade agreements with a number of nations and trading blocs worldwide. France has several overseas *départements* which are treated as *de jure* mainland France with fully implemented treaties with the EU. France is a leading world trader; it is a major exporter of agricultural produce and processed food, its industrial base includes vehicles, aerospace and high-speed trains, telecommunications, weapons and consumer goods.

Imports

Principal imports are machinery and equipment, vehicles, crude oil, aircraft, plastics and chemicals.

Main sources: Germany (19 per cent of total in 2012), Belgium (11.1 per cent), Italy (7.4 per cent).

Exports

Principal exports include machinery and vehicles, trains and other rail equipment, aircraft, plastics, chemicals and pharmaceuticals, iron and steel, food and beverages.

Main destinations: Germany (16.2 per cent of total in 2012), Belgium (7.3 per cent), Italy (7.3 per cent).

Agriculture

France is a major European food producer with self-sufficiency in dairy produce and is a substantial exporter of livestock produce, wine, fruit and vegetables. Agriculture contributes around 3.1 per cent to GDP and employs 5 per cent of the labour force.

The EU's Fundamental reform to the Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) was introduced in France in 2005. The subsidies paid on farm output, which tended to benefit large farms and encourage over-production, were replaced by single farm payments not conditional on production. With the growing global demand for Champagne, which reached a record of almost 151 million bottles in 2007, the government extended the growing region, officially allowing vintners within the newly expanded area to designate their sparkling wine as Champagne. An area of 33,500 hectares in north-eastern France is the only place worldwide allowed to use the coveted Appellation d'Origine Contrôlée (AOC) and to label its wine Champagne. The last expansion of the Champagne region was in 1927; the latest enlargement will become operational in 2009, with the new AOC Champagne expected to be ready for sale by 2019. Although oyster farming remains highly vulnerable to the risk of disease, France is the top European producer of oysters and among the first three producers of mussels (from both fishing and aquaculture).

France is also the top European producer of fresh water trout and has remained competitive with European regions with more favourable environmental conditions. Sea bass and sea bream represent the majority of marine farm production with turbot farming expanding. Only part of the production is for domestic consumption, the remainder being exported. Forestry is France's richest natural resource with over a quarter (15 million hectares) of metropolitan France covered by forest, giving it the largest tree-covered area in the EU. The Office National des Forêts (ONF) (National Forestry Office) manages over a quarter of this area. Forestry is concentrated in the east, south and south-west of the country, with the largest area being the Landes, coastal forests south of Bordeaux. Deciduous forests account for 61 per cent of the total, while 38 per cent are coniferous or mixed. About 8 per cent of the wooded area is brushwood.

Although it is a net importer of sawn softwoods and pulp for its paper industry,

France remains the largest producer of sawn hardwood in Europe. The forestry industry supplies raw materials to several industries. About 60 per cent of French wood production is used in the construction industry.

Industry and manufacturing

France has a broad industrial base incorporating a large capital-intensive state-owned sector, composed mainly of small- and medium-sized manufacturing enterprises, which together contribute around 25 per cent to GDP and employ 27 per cent of the labour force. Industrial policy is generally aimed at developing the domestic market, promotion of 'new technology' sectors and internationalisation of state-owned companies. Government protection of industry is an important economic issue and one which threatens both to retard the efficiency of domestic markets and alienate France's European partners. Leading sectors include agri-foodstuffs, telecommunications, aerospace, motor industry, metallurgy, chemicals, paracetamol and pharmaceuticals, textiles and clothing.

Tourism

France has a reputation for haute cuisine, couture and culture, as offered in world class restaurants, cities and museums and galleries; it has historical sites that stretch back to the Roman Empire and others that have an importance to the modern world, it produces outstanding wine and cheeses. It was the birthplace of sun-worshipping holidays along its Mediterranean coast and any number of winter skiing resorts. France is the number one tourist destination in the world, attracting over 79 million visitors in 2008, of which around 60 million arrived by road. The record number of tourists in 2008 was despite the beginning of a slump caused by the global economic crisis that cut tourism worldwide. By the first quarter of 2009 year-on-year international tourist arrivals to France had fallen 19.6 per cent and accommodation by 20.3 per cent. Despite Europe experiencing the greatest fall in growth in 2010 (exacerbated by the grounding of flights due to a volcanic ash cloud during the busy tourist season) France's premier position was not threatened, as tourists returned to pre-2009 numbers.

Travel and tourism in 2011 is forecast to directly contribute 3.9 per cent of GDP, and 9.1 per cent through total indirect contribution. Direct employment in the sector was predicted to be 4.5 per cent of total (1.15 million jobs) and 10.2 per cent of indirect employment (2.6 million jobs). Tourism was expected to generate €43.5 billion (US\$60.8 billion) in foreign

exchange and the industry to have had direct investment of €12.3 billion (US\$17.2 billion), 3 per cent of total investment committed for 2011.

Mining

The mining sector typically contributes 7 per cent to annual GDP and employs less than 1 per cent of the workforce. France is a significant producer of iron ore, bauxite and potash. In an effort to reduce dependence on imported minerals, exploration for lead, zinc, barium and tungsten has been intensified.

Hydrocarbons

Proven oil reserves were 1,220 million barrels in 2007. Crude oil production has declined since about 1990 from 67,000 barrels per day (bpd) to 19,840bpd in 2007. France is a heavy consumer of oil, amounting to two million bpd, most of which is imported from Norway, Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Although France has a lack of crude oil supplies the French oil company TotalFinaElf is one of the world's largest and most active international oil producers.

On 6 July 2011, parliament voted to ban hydraulic fracturing of shale oil and gas development. France is the first country to ban the technique (commonly referred to as fracking), that releases hydrocarbons from shale after being bombarded by high-pressure water, but has also been blamed for causing substrata instability. Proven natural gas reserves were 9.6 billion cubic metres (cum) in 2007, but consumption is typically over 45 billion cum and imports are required to make up the shortfall. Gaz de France (GdF), the majority government-owned utility, dominates gas activities and since energy markets inside the EU was opened to competition, around 30 per cent of GdF customers live outside France. The majority of gas pipelines are operated by GdF, including intra-European links.

Negotiations began in October 2009 between the majority state-owned energy company EDF and Russia to invest in the South Stream gas pipeline between Russia and Bulgaria in exchange for a long-term contract. EDF aims to acquire 15 per cent of gas volume sales in France, Germany, Italy and the UK by 2015.

The coal-mining industry ended with the closure of the last mine in 2004, but some coal is imported for the remaining coal-fired power stations and the steel industry.

Energy

France is one of the world's largest nuclear power producers and is Europe's largest electricity net exporter. Total electricity generation capacity was 116

gigawatts (GW) in 2007, producing 542.4 billion kilowatt hours (kWh). Over 80 per cent of French electricity is generated by its 58 nuclear power stations, comprising 34 reactors of 900MW, 20 reactors of 1.3GW and 4 reactors of 1.45GW. In 2007 France consumed over 450 billion kWh or 100 million tonnes of oil equivalent. The government plans to expand the sector with the construction of a new generation of reactors as well as upgrading existing assets.

The leading electricity entity is EDF (Electricité de France), which is a limited-liability corporation, with 85/15 per cent government/private ownership, responsible for producing electricity, supplying around 95 per cent of all electricity in the country and delivering it nationally. Overseas, EDF has partnerships with electricity companies in North and South America, Africa, Asia and Europe.

Financial markets

Stock exchange

Euronext Paris

Commodity exchange

Liffe Connect

Banking and insurance

Central bank

Banque de France; European Central Bank (ECB)

Time

GMT plus one hour (daylight saving, late March to late October, GMT plus two hours)

Geography

France is bordered to the north by the English Channel (La Manche), and to the north-east, east and south-east by Belgium, Luxembourg, Germany, Switzerland and Italy, respectively. The Mediterranean Sea forms the southern boundary, and Spain the south-western, while the west coast faces the Atlantic Ocean. France, the largest country in the west of Europe, has lush farming land, extensive forest and a large alluvial salt marsh that makes up much of the province of the Camargue. The overall impression is of a rolling landscape from the south-west to north-east and mountainous regions for the rest of the country. There are four major river systems (the Seine, Loire, Rhone and Marne) that drain into either the Atlantic Ocean, English Channel or the Mediterranean Sea. The highest mountain, Mont Blanc (4,810 metres), is situated in the French Alps in the south-east.

Hemisphere

Northern

Climate

France has a moderate maritime climate in the north with a small temperature range and abundant rainfall. By contrast,

southern France has a Mediterranean climate, with hot dry summers and mild, moist winters. Eastern France has a continental climate, with thunderstorms prevalent in summer. The average temperature in Paris in January is three degrees Celsius (C) and in July 18 degrees C. Annual rainfall in Paris is 573mm.

Dress codes

Western dress is the norm.

Entry requirements

Passports

Passports are required by all, except nationals of EU countries with national ID cards. Passports must be valid for three months beyond the length of stay.

Visa

Required by all, except citizens of EU countries, North America, Australasia and Japan, for stays up to three months; this includes business trips by representatives of foreign entities with an invitation from a local company or organisation. Proof of adequate funds for stay, an itinerary, a guarantee of repatriation if necessary and return/onward ticket are also required. For further exceptions, full details and a copy of the application form visit www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/thema/dossier.gb.asp and follow the path (entering France) to the database. A Schengen visa application (offered in several languages) can be downloaded from <http://europa.eu/abc/travel/> see 'documents you will need'.

Currency advice/regulations

There are no limits to the amount of local or foreign currency imported or exported, although amounts exceeding eur7,600 must be declared.

Customs

Personal items are duty-free. There are no duties levied on alcohol and tobacco between EU member states, providing amounts imported are for personal consumption.

Plant material, meat products from Africa and valuable art or antique objects must be declared.

Health (for visitors)

Nationals of the European Economic Area (EEA) countries and Switzerland can access reduced cost and sometimes free medical treatment using a European Health Insurance Card (EHIC) while visiting the EEA. Exceptions include nationals of the 10 countries which joined the EU in 2004 whose EHIC is not valid in Switzerland. Applications for the EHIC should be made before travelling.

Mandatory precautions

None

Advisable precautions

There are no particular health hazards in France, although rabies is a problem in some rural areas.

Medical insurance is advisable for visitors of non-EEA countries as healthcare costs can be high. Only medication for personal use may be bought into France.

Hotels

Classified into deluxe and one- to four-star. Reservations (either direct or through centralised booking offices) should be made in advance during holiday seasons. Single rooms are rare and rates are usually quoted for double rooms. A tip of around 12–15 per cent of the bill is usual, provided no service charge has already been added.

Credit cards

All major credit cards are accepted.

Public holidays (national)

Fixed dates

1 Jan (New Year's Day), 1 May (Labour Day), 8 May (Victory Day), 14 Jul (Bastille Day), 15 Aug (Assumption Day), 1 Nov (All Saints' Day), 11 Nov (Armistice Day) and 25 Dec (Christmas Day).

The months of July and August are traditionally when the French take their holidays.

Variable dates

Easter Monday, Ascension Day, Whit Monday.

Working hours

Anyone intending to visit France for business purposes should avoid the traditional holiday month of August, when most businesses and government departments have only a skeleton staff at work.

Banking

Mon–Fri: 0900–1200 and 1400–1600. Some banks close on Mondays and all close early on the day before a Bank Holiday.

Business

Mon–Fri: 0900–1200 and 1400–1800.

Government

Mon–Fri: 0830–1800.

Shops

Mon–Fri: 0900–1830 (most shops are closed between 1200–1430). Some shops open on Sundays and some close on Mondays.

Telecommunications

Postal services

The main Paris post office, at Louvre metro station, is open 24 hours, all year round.

Mobile/cell phones

There are 900/1800 and 3G GSM services available throughout all of the country.

Electricity supply

220V AC

Social customs/useful tips

In France, strangers and acquaintances shake hands at the beginning and end of a meeting.

Most offices traditionally have a long lunch hour, lasting from 1200 until at least 1400. Lunchtime remains a popular time for doing business, with a number of restaurants in big cities catering expressly for business clients.

French nationals must carry identification at all times. Visitors should carry their passports. Spot identity checks are not uncommon and it is illegal to be without identification.

Security

Serious crimes represent only a tiny percentage of the total number reported, while there has been a big rise in delinquency, vandalism and petty theft. Pickpockets operate particularly in train stations and subways.

France has one of the highest road accident rates in Europe.

Getting there

Air

France has a number of airports located in the various regions receiving international flights.

National airline: Air France

International airport/s: Paris-Charles de Gaulle Airport (CDG), 23km north-east of Paris. Facilities include a business centre, bank, post office, restaurants, bars, duty-free shopping, medical centre and pharmacy. Car hire is available.

Other airport/s: Orly (ORY), 14km south of Paris; Bordeaux (BOD), 12km from city; Lille (LIL), 15km from city; Lyon (LYS), 24km east of Lyon; Marseille (MRS), 24km north of city; Nice (NCE), 6km west of Nice; Toulouse (TLS), 10km from city; Biarritz (BIQ); Nantes (NTE); Perpignan (PGF) and Strasbourg (SXB).

Airport tax: None

Surface

France has good rail, road and sea connections with all surrounding countries.

Rail: The Eurostar service is provided by Belgium, UK and French railways, operating high speed rail connections between London, Paris and Brussels. Road vehicles are transported through the tunnel in Le Shuttle trains.

Water: There are regular cross channel ferries from the UK and Mediterrean ferries to Corsica, Spain (Balearic Islands) and North Africa.

Main port/s: Marseille (Europe's third-largest port), Boulogne, Nice, Calais, Dieppe, Dunkirk, Cherbourg, Le Havre, Rouen.

Getting about

National transport

Air: Paris is the most important business destination in France and is served by the

two main airports, at Orly and Charles de Gaulle. Major cities are linked by Air France. Some services operate only during summer.

Road: France has the densest road network in the world. There are 806,000km of roads, including 7,100km of motorways, most of which are *autoroutes à péage* (toll roads).

Buses: There are good local bus services and some long-distance coach services.

Rail: French transport policy favours the railways. The Société Nationale des Chemins de Fer Français (SNCF) (French National Railroad Company) operates a nationwide network reaching to almost every part of the country. The most important rail lines radiate from Paris. Three high-speed train (TGV) lines link northern and southern France. These trains are modern and comfortable; seats can be booked in advance.

Water: There are approximately 9,000km of inland navigable waterways. Major canal areas are situated in the north and north-east of Paris, where the majority of the navigable rivers, including the Seine, the Rhine, the Midi, Brittany and the Loire are connected with canals.

City transport

Paris has one of the best urban transport networks in the world. A *Carte Orange Hebdomadaire* allows unlimited travel for one week on most forms of public transport.

Taxis: From Charles de Gaulle and Orly airports to the city centre, limousines and taxis are available.

Taxis are only available from *stations de taxi* (taxi ranks). Day and night rates should be displayed inside the vehicle.

Note that extra charges are usually levied for journeys to racecourses, stations and airports. Tipping is usually 10–15 per cent.

Buses, trams & metro: In Paris, the same tickets may be used on buses and the metro; a carnet of 10 tickets is cheaper. Buses operate between 0600–2100; some exceptional routes operate until 0030.

Car hire

All major international hire companies have offices in Paris and other main towns. Drivers must carry at all times: a passport or national ID card, a valid driving licence, car ownership papers and proof of insurance.

Traffic drives on the right. *Priorité à droite* applies, particularly in built-up areas – cars coming out of a side turning on the right have priority, unless suspended where a sign indicates. Speed limits: 130kph on toll motorways, 110kph on dual carriageways, 90kph on other roads and 60kph in towns. Note that these limits are reduced when wet. Speed limits for

drivers who have held their licence for less than two years are 110kph on motorways, 100kph on dual carriageways and 80kph on other roads.

Wearing of seat belts is compulsory in front seats.

BUSINESS DIRECTORY

The addresses listed below are a selection only. While World of Information makes every endeavour to check these addresses, we cannot guarantee that changes have not been made, especially to telephone numbers and area codes. We would welcome any corrections.

Telephone area codes

The International direct dialling (IDD) code for France is +33, followed by area code and subscriber's number:

Paris 1	
North-west (Nantes, Rouen, etc)	2
North-east (Lille, Strasbourg etc)	3
South-east and Corsica (Lyon, Marseilles, etc)	4
South-west (Bordeaux, Toulouse, etc)	5

Useful telephone numbers

Police: 17

Fire: 18

Medical emergency and ambulance: 15

Chambers of Commerce

American Chamber of Commerce in France, 156 Boulevard Haussmann, 75008 Paris (tel: 5643-4567; fax: 5643-4560; e-mail: amchamfrance@amchamfrance.org)

Assemblée des Chambres Françaises de Commerce et d'Industrie, 45 Avenue d'Iéna, PO Box 3003, 75773 Paris Cedex 16 (tel: 4069-3700; fax: 4720-6128; e-mail: contactdie@acfc.cci.fr).

Boulogne-sur-Mer Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 98 Quai Gambetta, 62204 Boulogne-sur-Mer (tel: 2199-6200; fax: 2199-6201; e-mail: ccibco@boulogne-sur-mer.cci.fr).

Bordeaux Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 12 Place de la Bourse, 33076 Bordeaux (tel: 5679-5000; fax: 5569-5265; e-mail: bourse@bordeaux.cci.fr).

British-French Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 31 Rue Boissy d'Anglas, 75008 Paris (tel: 5330-8130; fax: 5330-8135; e-mail: information@francobritishchamber.com).

Calais Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 24 Boulevard des Alliés, PO Box 199, 62104 Calais Cedex (tel: 2146-0000; fax: 2146-0099; e-mail: ccic@calais.cci.fr).

Grenoble Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 1 Place André Malraux, PO Box 297, 38016 Grenoble Cedex 1 (tel:

7628-2828; fax: 7628-2747; e-mail: ccig@grenoble.cci.fr).

Loiret Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 23 Place du Martrou, 45044 Orléans Cedex 1 (tel: 3877-7777; fax: 3853-0978; e-mail: direction@loiret.cci.fr).

Lorraine Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 10 Viaduc J-F Kennedy, CS 4231, 54042 Nancy Cedex (tel: 8390-1313; fax: 8328-8833; e-mail: crci@lorraine.cci.fr).

Lyon Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, Palais du Commerce, Place de la Bourse, 69289 Lyon Cedex 2 (tel: 7240-5858; fax: 7837-5346; e-mail: info@lyon.cci.fr).

Nantes Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 16 Quai Ernest Renaud, PO Box 90517, 44105 Nantes Cedex 4 (tel: 4044-6060; fax: 4044-6090; e-mail: administrator@nantes.cci.fr).

Nice Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 20 Boulevard Carabacel, PO Box 1259, 06005 Nice Cedex 1 (tel: 0820-422-222; fax: 9313-7399; e-mail: mde.nice.carabacel@cote-azur.cci.fr).

Rennes Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 2 Avenue de la Préfecture, CS 64204, 35042 Rennes Cedex (tel: 9933-6666; fax: 9333-2428; e-mail: info@rennes.cci.fr).

Rouen Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, Palais des Consuls, Quai de la Bourse, PO Box 641, 76007 Rouen Cedex 1 (tel: 3414-3737; fax: 3514-3838; e-mail: ccir@rouen.cci.fr).

Strasbourg Chambre de Commerce et d'Industrie, 10 Place Gutenberg, 67081 Strasbourg Cedex (tel: 0388-752-525; fax: 0388-223-120; e-mail: direction@strasbourg.cci.fr).

Banking

Association Française de Banques, 18 Rue la Fayette, 75009 Paris (tel: 4246-9259).

Banque Française du Commerce Extérieur (BFCE), 21 Boulevard Haussmann, 75009 Paris (tel: 4800-4800; fax: 4800-3970).

Banque Indosuez, 96 Boulevard Haussmann, 75008 Paris (tel: 4420-2020; fax: 4420-1522).

Banque Nationale de Paris SA, 16 Boulevard des Italiens, 75009 Paris (tel: 4014-4546; fax: 4014-5599).

Banque Paribas, 3 Rue d'Antin, 75078 Paris Cedex 02 (tel: 4298-1234; fax: 4298-0433).

Caisse Centrale des Banques Populaires, 10-12 avenue Winston Churchill, 94677

Charenton Le Pont Cedex (tel: 4039-0000; fax: 4039-3940).

Caisse d'Épargne, 19 Rue du Louvre, 75001 Paris (tel: 4041-3031; fax: 4233-4518).

Compagnie Bancaire, 5 Avenue Kléber, 75798 Paris Cedex 16 (tel: 4525-2525; fax: 4501-7805).

Compagnie Financière de Crédit Industriel et Commercial (CIC Group), Rue de la Victoire 66, 75009 Paris (tel: 4280-8080).

Crédit Agricole, Boulevard Pasteur 91-93, 75015 Paris (tel: 4323-5202).

Crédit Commercial de France (CCF), 103 Avenue des Champs-Élysées, 75008 Paris (tel: 4070-7040; fax: 4070-7353).

Crédit Foncier de France, SA, 19 Rue des Capucines, 75001 Paris (tel: 4244-8000; fax: 4244-7822).

Crédit Local de France, 7-11 Quai André Citroën, 75015 Paris (tel: 4392-7777; fax: 4592-7672).

Crédit Lyonnais SA, Boulevard des Italiens 19, 75002 Paris (tel: 4295-7000).

Crédit Mutuel, 88 Rue Cardinet, 75017 Paris (tel: 4401-1010; fax: 4401-1227).

Société Générale, Boulevard Haussmann 29, 75009 Paris (tel: 4298-2000).

Union Européenne de CIC (CIC Group), 4 Rue Gaillon, 75107 Paris Cedex 02 (tel: 4266-7000; fax: 4266-7878).

Central bank

Banque de France, 31 Rue Croix des Petits Champs, 75001 Paris (tel: 4292-4292; fax: 4292-3940; e-mail: infos@banque-france.fr).

European Central Bank, Kaiserstrasse 29, D-60311 Frankfurt am Main, Germany (tel: (+49-69) 13-440; fax: (+49-69) 1344-6000; e-mail: info@ecb.int).

Stock exchange

Euronext Paris, www.euronext.com

Chi-X, www.chi-x.com

Commodity exchange

Liffe Connect, www.nyse.com/nyseeuronext

Travel information

Air France (head office), 1 Place Max-Hymans, Paris 75757 Cedex 15 (tel: 4323-8181; internet site: http://www.airfrance.fr).

Airport office: 45 Rue de Paris, Roissy Charles de Gaulle, Paris 95747 (tel: 4156-7800).

Maison de la France (tourist office), 8 Avenue de l'Opéra, Paris 75001 (tel: 4296-1023; fax: 4286-8052).

Roissy Charles de Gaulle and Le Bourget airports, BP 20101, 95711 Roissy

Charles de Gaulle Cedex (tel: 4862-1212, 4864-6807) (24 hours).

Ministries

Ministry of Agriculture, Fisheries and Food, 78 Rue de Varenne, 75700 Paris (tel: 4955-4955; fax: 4955-4039).

Ministry of Capital Works, Housing, and Transport, 246 Blvd Saint-Germain, 75007 Paris (tel: 4081-2122; fax: 4081-3099).

Ministry of the Civil Service, Administrative Reform and Decentralisation, 72 Rue de Varenne, 75700 Paris (tel: 4275-8000; fax: 4275-8970).

Ministry of Culture and Communication, 3 Rue de Valois, 75042 Paris (tel: 4015-8000; fax: 4261-3577).

Ministry of Defence, 14 Rue Saint-Dominique, 75700 Paris (tel: 4219-3011; fax: 4505-4091).

Ministry for the Economy, Finance and Industry, 139 Rue de Bercy, 75572 Paris Cedex 12 (tel: 5318-4000; fax: 5318-9701; internet site: www.minefi.gouv.fr).

Ministry of Employment, Rue de Grenelle, 75700 Paris (tel: 4438-3838; fax: 4438-2010).

Ministry of the Environment, 20 Avenue de Segur, 75302 Paris 07 SP (tel: 4219-2021; fax: 4219-1120).

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 37 Quai d'Orsay, 75700 Paris (tel: 4317-5353; fax: 4551-6012).

Ministry of Industry, the Post Office and Telecommunications, 101 Rue de Grenelle, 75700 Paris 9 (tel: 4319-3636; fax: 4319-3052).

Ministry of the Interior, Place Beauvau, 75800 Paris (tel: 4927-4927; fax: 4266-1280).

Ministry of Justice, 13 Place Vendôme, 75042 Paris (tel: 4477-6060; fax: 4477-6000).

Ministry of Labour and Social Affairs, 127 Rue de Grenelle, 75700 Paris (tel: 4438-3838; fax: 4056-6710).

Ministry of National Education, Higher Education and Research, 110 Rue de Grenelle, 75700 Paris (tel: 4955-1010; fax: 4955-1556).

Ministry for Relations with Parliament, 69 Rue de Varenne, 75700 Paris (tel: 4275-8000; fax: 4081-7300).

Ministry of Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises, Trade and Artisan Activities, 80 Rue de Lille, 75700 Paris (tel: 4319-2424; fax: 4319-3767).

Ministry of Town and Country Planning, Urban Affairs and Integration, 35 Rue

Nations of the World: A Political, Economic and Business Handbook

Saint-Dominique, 75700 Paris (tel: 4275-8000; fax: 4275-7755).

Ministry of Youth and Sport, Rue Olivier de Serres, 75015 Paris (tel: 5369-3000; fax: 5369-4370).

Prime Minister's Office, 57 Rue de Varenne, 75700 Paris (tel: 4275-8000; fax: 4544-1572).

Other useful addresses

Agence France Presse (news agency), 11-15 Place de la Bourse, 75002 Paris (tel: 4041-4646; fax: 4041-4632).

ANIT (public information service), 8 Avenue de l'Opéra, 75001 Paris (tel: 4260-3738).

La Bourse de Paris (Stock Exchange), 39 Rue Cambon, 75001 Paris (tel: 4927-7000; fax: 4289-7868).

Bureau International des Expositions (International Exhibition Bureau), 56 Avenue Victor-Hugo, 75116 Paris (tel: 4500-3863; fax: 4500-9615).

Caisse Centrale de Co-opération Economique (CCCE), 233 Boulevard Saint-Germain, Paris (tel: 4550-3220).

Centre Française du Commerce Extérieur, 10 Avenue d'Iéna, 75116 Paris (tel: 4505-3000).

Direction Générale des Impôts, Centre des Non-Résidents, 9 Rue d'Uzès, 75094 Paris.

France Telecom, 6 Place d'Alleray, 75505 Paris Cedex 15.

French Embassy (USA), 4101 Reservoir Road, NW, Washington DC 20007 (tel: (+1-202)-944-6000; fax: (+1-202)-944-6166).

Institut National de la Statistique et des Etudes Economiques (INSEE), 18 Boulevard Adolphe Pinard, 75675 Paris Cedex 14 (tel: 4117-5050; fax: 4117-6666; internet site: <http://www.insee.fr>).

Invest in France Network/DATAR, 1 Avenue Charles Floquet, 75343 Paris Cedex 07 (tel: 4065-1006; fax: 4065-1240).

Service de la Répression des Fraudes et du Contrôle de la Qualité, 44 Boulevard de Grenelle, 75732 Paris.

Post Office, 52 rue du Louvre, Paris (tel: 4028-2000).

National news agency: Agence France Presse

11-15 Place de la Bourse, 75002 Paris (tel: 4041-4646; fax: 4041-4632; www.afp.com).

Other news agencies: Reuters: <http://fr.reuters.com>

Focus: www.focusinfo.eu

Internet sites

Ferry information: http://seafrance.com/ferryes_to_france.html

France Bottin (provides market information on France's main companies): www.bottin.fr

French electronic phonebook (searches can be conducted by name or by regions): www.epita.fr:5000/11/english.html

Tourist information: www.francetourism.com/