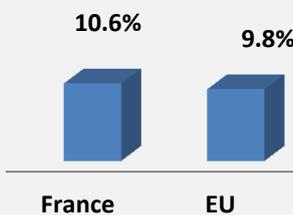


Recent history

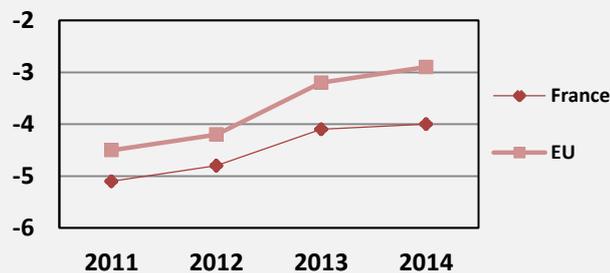
The Fifth French **Republic** was created in 1958 following a referendum that replaced the previous constitution. French governments have traditionally been made up of **coalitions**: the Union for a Popular Movement (UMP) and the Union for French Democracy (UDF) are the main parties on the right, while left-of-centre coalitions have consisted of the French Socialist Party (PS), the French Communist Party and the Greens. Between 1958 and 2012, France was largely governed by centre-right coalitions, except between 1981 and 1995, when it was led by President François Mitterand of the Socialist Party.

In recent years, French politics has witnessed many upheavals. In the 2002 presidential election, President Jacques Chirac faced a stiff challenge from the far-right leader of the National Front (FN), Jean-Marie Le Pen. Le Pen's daughter, Marine Le Pen, was the far-right candidate in the 2012 French presidential election, coming in third behind François Hollande, who won, and Nicolas Sarkozy.

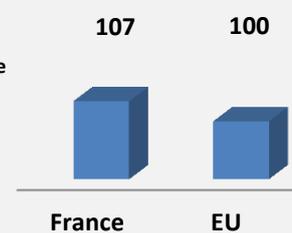
Unemployment rate (2015)



Public budget deficit/surplus



GDP per capita in PPS (2013)



Current government

France (officially the French Republic) is a unitary state with a **semi-presidential system**. The head of state and head of the executive is the president (currently François Hollande), who is elected for a 5-year term and can only serve a maximum of two terms. The president appoints a prime minister (currently Manuel Valls), who forms a government. The French Parliament is made up of two houses or chambers, the lower and principal is the National Assembly (*Assemblée Nationale*), the second is the Senate (*Sénat*). Members of Parliament (*Députés*) are elected every five years. Senators are elected by 'grand electors' who are mostly other local elected representatives. The prime minister and cabinet are exclusively accountable to the assembly majority, but the parliament may remove them from office with a vote of no confidence. The president does not have the right to dismiss the prime minister or the cabinet. The president has to name a prime minister who is acceptable to the majority party within parliament – if the prime minister comes from an opposing party, this is called cohabitation; in this case, the president takes responsibility for foreign policy, while the prime minister is responsible for domestic policy. Until 2014, the left-wing Socialist party had a majority in both houses, but following the municipal elections, the Socialists lost their majority in the Senate.

France: key facts



❖ Capital	Paris
❖ Population	66 million (2014)
❖ % of total EU population	13%
❖ Official language	French
❖ Year of EU accession	1958 (founding member)
❖ Currency	Euro since 1999
❖ Schengen Area member	Yes, since 1995
❖ Seats in European Parliament	74

France and the EU

Since the foundation of the European Union, France has been a driving force behind many European projects. Two of the men who did the most to create the EU, Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman, were Frenchmen. So was Jacques Delors, who led the European Community during the period of its most rapid transformation between 1985 and 1995. France participates in all of the most far-reaching EU projects, including Economic and Monetary Union and the Schengen Convention.

However, this does not mean that the French always accept EU action unquestioningly. President Charles de Gaulle, President throughout the 1960s, was a strong critic of European integration, even going as far as carrying out a six-month boycott of the European Community in 1965. Ambiguous attitudes continued. Having narrowly accepted the Maastricht Treaty in 1992, the French electorate rejected the European Constitution in a referendum in May 2005. The referendum debate demonstrated that many in France have a different vision of Europe that stresses social protection above the promotion of free markets.

In September 2010, furthermore, France drew criticism from the EU when it enacted a policy of 'voluntary' repatriations of Roma, paying individuals €300 to leave France. The EU Commission said it would investigate and take legal action against France if its policy were found to be illegal (i.e. in violation of the EU's 2004 Free Movement of Persons Directive).

Nevertheless, France remains at the centre of EU politics. For example, the country is the largest beneficiary of the EU's controversial Common Agricultural Policy (CAP), which costs 41 per cent of the annual EU budget. France also played a key role in helping Greece to reach a deal over its debt crisis in 2015.

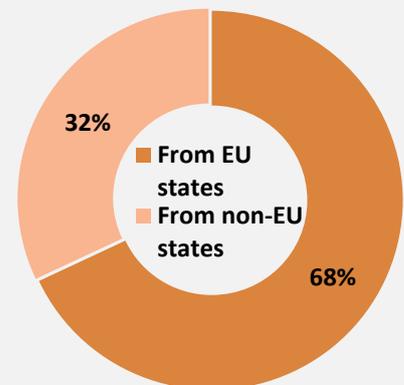
Budgets and funding:

- ❖ Total French contribution to the EU budget – €21.874 billion (2013)
- ❖ Total EU spending in France – € 14.239 billion (2013)

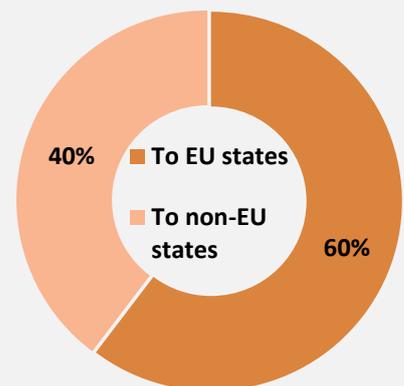
"To understand Europe, you have to be a genius - or French."

Madeleine Albright, US Secretary of State 1997-2001

French imports (2014)



French exports (2014)



Technical Terms

- ❖ **Coalition:** a formal agreement between political parties to share power in government
- ❖ **PPS:** GDP per head is expressed in Purchasing Power Standards (PPS) to eliminate the differences in price levels between countries allowing meaningful volume comparisons of GDP between countries
- ❖ **Republic:** A representative democracy with a written constitution of basic rights that protect the minority from being completely unrepresented or overridden by the majority, usually without a monarch.
- ❖ **Semi-presidential system:** A system of government in which a constitution includes a popularly elected fixed-term president and a prime minister and cabinet who are collectively responsible to the legislature.

Links

- ❖ <http://www.premier-ministre.gouv.fr/en/>