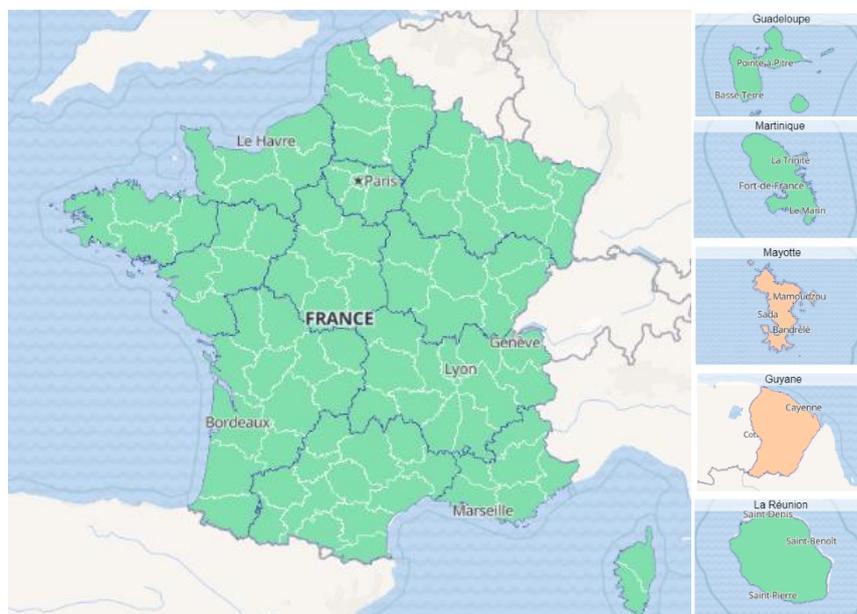


**Tuesday 30<sup>th</sup> June 2020** : since my last newsletter three weeks ago, President Emmanuel Macron addressed the Nation for the fourth time on Sunday 14<sup>th</sup> June to announce that as the whole country was classified as a green zone, bars and restaurants could reopen completely allowing customers inside from Monday 15<sup>th</sup> June in mainland France. Guyana in South America and Mayotte, an island to the north of Madagascar in the Indian Ocean, remain as orange zones.

Whilst warning that the coronavirus was still at large in mainland France, thus requiring the continuation of sanitary measures, social distancing and testing & screening, this more or less signalled that France was back in business. Border controls between the 26 countries in the Schengen area were removed the same day. Attendance at school (*écoles & collèges*) became compulsory again a week later as from Monday 22<sup>nd</sup> June except in sixth form colleges (*lycées*).



Quarantine has continued for travellers coming from outside the Schengen area which includes UK but special dispensation was allowed for business delegations of visiting Heads of State which allowed President Macron to visit London for the day on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> June to commemorate the 80<sup>th</sup> anniversary of de Gaulle's wartime "*appel*" to the free French resistance.

Now, France is moving on again and from tomorrow Wednesday 1<sup>st</sup> July, along with other EU members, will relax quarantine restrictions for travellers from a further 15 countries worldwide. Of specific interest in the francophone sphere are North African neighbours Algeria, Morocco & Tunisia which have close ex-colonial ties, as well as Canada with its significant French speaking population in Quebec. Also on the list are Japan & South Korea which enjoy close trading and tourism links with France, as are Australia and New Zealand who are also good trading partners with a growing number of French speaking communities.

For the time being, the United States and Brazil are not on the list so travel to and from those countries is effectively banned for the general public. China is on the list pending a reciprocal arrangement. Quarantine will be lifted between EU & UK as considered "automatically safe" as are non-EU Schengen countries Switzerland, Iceland & Norway. A reciprocal arrangement is to be sought with UK in view of the economic impact of the holiday season. It is interesting to note that UK is considering the use of travel corridors to and from Europe. This worked effectively for a short while between Schengen countries before border controls were removed. Notably, air bridges were adopted by Germany as soon as Spain allowed tourists back onto their beaches.

In general, the French have been well behaved and patiently waited until the Government announced easing of the lockdown measures though the financial penalties imposed for any breach were surely a deterrent. Even now the all clear has sounded, there are few reported instances of large crowds deliberately flouting the sanitary rules and social distancing criteria by flooding onto beaches or beauty spots such as has been witnessed recently in UK though scenes of celebration following Sunday's municipal elections left a lot to be desired.

Group activities remain restricted to ten persons together so team contact sports are still banned though there is plenty of evidence that people are now exercising seriously out of doors and clubs have opened again. As I exercise gently along the towpath of the adjacent river Marne, I witness many small groups of cyclists, canoeists, joggers and walkers doing their thing. France seems to be the only country in Europe where professional football has not begun again, even behind closed doors, though everyone is looking forward to the rescheduled *Tour de France* cycle race which will now take place between 29<sup>th</sup> August and 20<sup>th</sup> September, two months later than originally planned.

Every day, more museums and national heritage sites are announcing their reopening as are amusement parks and zoos. The Eiffel Tower in Paris reopened last Thursday 25<sup>th</sup> June though as previously announced only to second floor level and without lifts. Cinemas and theatres have reopened though are required to respect the new standards so will not play to full houses as spacing between seats or small groups has to be maintained.

Since activities with more than 10 persons remain on the banned list, discotheques, indoor swimming pools and sport stadia remain closed. Holiday destinations including campsites, hotels and bed & breakfast establishments are now allowed to open again and the tourist industry is reporting a surge in bookings for French destinations. Airlines are again taking bookings in anticipation of air corridors being opened to tourist destinations abroad.

The authorities are prepared for local outbreaks and the public has been warned that this could happen but up to now the daily new virus cases remain low. As I write this, the BBC is recording that the UK death rate is now back to its normal level for this time of year even as Leicester is experiencing a sudden peak of infections leading to a renewed local lockdown.

A local outbreak already happened in Germany a week ago when 1 300 new infection cases were recorded at a single meat processing plant in North Rhine-Westphalia which led to the local area being locked down immediately and pushed their national R value up to over 2.8 (the R-value being the number of people that one infected person can contaminate, when the R-value is below 1, scientists consider the virus spread is under control).

As life here returns to a "new normal", the principal event last weekend was the second round of municipal elections on Sunday 28<sup>th</sup> June postponed for 3 months since Sunday 22<sup>nd</sup> March. Some 5 000 communes (14% of all 35 000 communes) representing about a third of the voting public still had to elect their new mayor and the day brought several surprises. For detail results of each commune refer <https://elections.interieur.gouv.fr/municipales-2020/075/075056.html>

The green ecology party was the biggest winner dethroning long standing traditional candidates in several major cities like Lyon, Strasbourg, Bordeaux, Nancy, Tours and in large towns such as Besançon, Poitiers and Annecy. Three of these eight new mayors are women in Strasbourg, Besançon and Poitiers. Of the ten largest cities in France, five now have lady mayors.

In Paris, the outgoing socialist mayor Anne Hidalgo won a comfortable majority (48.7% compared to the second placed right wing candidate with 33.8%) to start a second tenure. Paris has now had a socialist mayor for the last 19 years following 24 years of right wing rule.

Nationally the traditional right and left wing parties are a spent force but in Lille, the tenth largest city in France, the long standing socialist candidate Martine Aubry clung to power by her finger tips. After several recounts, she was declared winner over the green candidate by just 227 votes being a 0.6% majority out of 39 481 voters with 84 958 abstentions, a huge 68% of the electoral register. Other large cities who elected socialist mayors but only by virtue of an alliance with the green ecology candidate were Rouen, Nantes & Clermont-Ferrand.

The average abstention rate nationwide was a record 58.4% and more than 20% higher than the previous national record of 37.9% six years ago in 2014. Reasons given for this apathy is first and foremost a fear of the corona virus which has resulted in low key campaigning. Door to door calling for party presentation is normal in France but this has not happened this time and it has been left to ambiguous circulars posted through the letter box (often contradicted the next day by a circular from another candidate) and a town square delegation each Saturday morning as the only visible signs that an election is taking place.

Three out of five French people, already burdened by serious issues related to personal health and finance have not responded to this additional call on their time. Other reasons given include a general lack of interest in politics and for many at local and national level, it doesn't make much difference who is in charge as nothing much seems to change. The principal categories of abstentions were recorded as teenagers, women, and people living in low-cost council housing.

In 14 of the larger towns, the abstention rate was higher than the national average citing Roubaix 77%, Creteil 77%, Sevran 75%, Vénissieux 74%, Nice 72%, Amiens 69%, Nantes 69%, Lille 68%, Rennes 68%, Grenoble 64%, Bordeaux 63%, Paris 63%, Strasbourg 63%, Pau 62%.

Marseilles, France's second largest city, previously a stronghold of the right wing under veteran mayor Jean-Claude Gaudin who at 80 years old was standing down after 25 years in office, still does not have a mayor and a third round will be required there to form a coalition. As in Paris, the collegial system elects the city mayor from the sixteen districts and a party needs 51 collegial seats out of 101 available to nominate their leader as mayor. Following Sunday's second round, the left wing candidate has 42 seats and the right wing candidate has 39 seats. Three other parties have the remaining 20 seats between them.

Some horse trading will be required to form a coalition in Marseilles city hall debating chamber to come up with the required majority. The traditional socialist allies could raise the red side of

the chamber to 50 seats and the traditional blue allies could raise their side of the chamber to 42 seats leaving the extreme far right with its nine seats holding the balance of power. No party wants to form a coalition with the far right so the final outcome is far from certain. In fact, there was so much mudslinging between candidates during the campaign accompanied by accusations of foul play, manipulation and vote rigging, that the outcome is far from certain.

The far right has only won a single significant town being Perpignan in the extreme south west of the country close to the Spanish frontier. Generally the party would have expected to do better.

In my small commune in the eastern suburbs of Paris, the abstention rate of 50.7% was lower than the national average and represented 2 437 voters out of a voting population of 4 806. The total number of valid votes cast was 2 332 (48.5%) with 37 spoiled papers (0.8%). The green candidate did very poorly finishing third out of three with only 160 votes (6.86%). The outgoing non-affiliated mayor was elected again with 1 179 votes (50.56%), a slightly increased majority over the right wing candidate who received 993 votes (42.58%). The winning candidate received 186 more votes than the second place candidate, a winning margin of 8.0%.

Interestingly, 203 more voters registered a vote in the second round than in the first round which coincidentally was the actual increase in the number of votes received by the winning candidate. The second candidate received 89 more votes than before which coincidentally was the same number of votes less than the third candidate received.

One thing certain from these elections is that overall, President Emmanuel Macron did not have a good day. His young party whilst popular at national level does not have the same credibility and numbers at local level to make a significant impact. Added to that, his impressive Prime Minister, Edouard Philippe, who has wooed the nation with his eloquent TV presentations about how his government is dealing with the corona virus, obtained a sweeping majority in his home town of Le Havre (58.8%) where he has been mayor since 2010 (though voluntarily stepped down in 2017 when he was appointed Prime Minister) just in case he needs a back-up job if the President decides that the monkey is becoming more popular than the organ grinder.

At the moment this is the case as Mr Philippe has enjoyed a jump in his popularity since the beginning of the pandemic to above 49% compared to the President whose ratings dropped in the same period to 39%. For the last two years they have enjoyed similar ratings working well as a team but as recently as February 2020 they were only in the 32%-33% range. During the pandemic their performance has been well received but more so Mr Philippe than Mr Macron.

With this in mind, during the lead up to Sunday, the media speculated that the President might reshuffle his government once the local elections were over and nominate a new Prime Minister to lead the next phase of economic rebuilding after devastation caused to the economy by the pandemic lockdown. On top of that, Mr Philippe has now acknowledged that he is suffering from vitiligo, a skin condition characterised by patchy loss of skin pigment generally considered as a stress related disorder which has the effect of turning the hair white in an affected area due to a lack of melanocyte cells which are responsible for maintaining natural skin and hair colouring.

This condition affects about 1% of the global population but is neither contagious nor painful. The result is purely aesthetic and usually happens gradually. The condition is not to be confused with normal hair colour loss due to ageing which affects most of us. Though severe shock can turn hair white overnight. The most famous exponent of this phenomenon is often cited as Marie Antoinette whose hair turned completely white during the night before she was beheaded though it is not sure if she was suffering from vitiligo.

With Mr Philippe, who has a full face beard & moustache (and is a keen boxer), few can have escaped to notice at each of his public appearances that a white streak on the left side of his beard is slowly spreading resulting in his progressively distinctive appearance of white one side, black the other. In public, the Prime Minister comes across as a calm and reasoned person who inspires confidence, characteristics essential for his position. But it can be no surprise that he suffers more than most from suppressed stress after the last two years of tumultuous public reaction as he has struggled to put into place Mr Macron's wide reaching plans for pension reforms. With that dossier far from completed, Covid-19 then distracted the national attention.

However, yesterday Mr Macron decided to maintain his team in place for the time being though has to decide whether the resounding victory of right wing Edouard Philippe as Mayor of Le Havre represents a conflict of interest. A law passed in 2014 specifically outlawed from 2017 the practice of accumulating elected mandates such as senator, deputy or mayor in a commune with more than 1 000 electors. A previous law passed in 2009 stated that a senator or deputy who was nominated as a government minister had to resign from the Senate or *Assemblée Nationale* but there is no law which actually forbids a sitting mayor from holding ministerial office.

When he was appointed by newly elected President Macron as Prime Minister in 2017 in an attempt to unify the country since Mr Macron's own fledgling party did not have many suitable candidates, Mr Philippe was legally obliged to resign as deputy at the *Assemblée Nationale*, a mandate for which he had been elected in 2012, and he voluntarily stood down from being Le Havre mayor stating that he felt it incompatible to serve as both mayor & Prime Minister. So he is perhaps now preparing for his own replacement. Certainly the issue has reignited public debate and Mr Macron has promised to make a decision by 7<sup>th</sup> July following a Council of Ministers on 3<sup>rd</sup> July. After all, being Prime Minister is generally considered to be a full time job.

Yesterday's political news though was overshadowed by the court ruling against the former Prime Minister, Francois Fillon, who held office for five years in the Sarkozy government from 2007 & 2012. In a fraud case nicknamed "*Penelopegate*" after his Welsh wife Penelope, Mr Fillon was found guilty of illicit use of public funds to pay his wife over one million Euros for work that she never did. He was condemned to five years in prison of which three years are suspended. It is a landmark case as he is the most senior politician to be given a custodial sentence since the start of the Fifth Republic in 1958. His wife was also condemned to three years suspended prison term for complicity to embezzle and conceal public funds. Each was fined 375 000 Euros and ordered to pay back the one million Euros considered to have been gained fraudulently. Mr Fillon was also barred from public office for ten years.

In her ruling, the female judge considered that the payments made far exceeded the value of any work done during Penelope's employment at the Senate as parliamentary assistant to both Mr Fillon and his successor and her job "had no use". Mr Fillon's successor as Senator after he became Prime Minister also received a suspended prison sentence for continuing the fictitious employment. Penelope was also found guilty of accepting 100 000 €uros for writing some brief articles for a magazine belonging to a friend of her husband, judged as being excessive payment for actual work done, in other words an illegal gift.

The three condemned have appealed so Mr Fillon won't be locked up straight away, his defence being that he had not done anything illegal and this was common practice. He also maintains the accusations were politically motivated and a hatchet job to scupper his presidential ambitions. Whilst many politicians' wives might agree with the sentiment that their moral support for their husbands' service to the country should be rewarded in a pecuniary fashion, the judge did not agree noting that the limelight and high standard of living enjoyed by senior politicians' partners should be considered sufficient reward for what is no more than normal marital support.

The scandal came to public attention through the pages of the national weekly satirical newspaper "*Le Canard Enchaîné*" in 2017 when Mr Fillon was the presidential candidate for the centre right wing Republican Party and favourite to be elected. He was forced to give a public apology in an attempt to save his campaign and acknowledged that whilst he had not acted illegally (in his opinion), he had not met the high level of trust expected from someone in his position. He also admitted he had arranged paid research experience in 2006 & 2007 for his two elder children who were studying law, again out of public funds. As a result of the scandal, his campaign imploded and at the first round he was left far behind in third place. The Republican Party has never recovered its previous popularity.

The France figures for Covid-19 up to the end of today (30<sup>th</sup> June 2020) with daily increase / decrease are as follows :

- total confirmed cases : 164 801 (increase of 541)
- total cumulative deaths : 29 843 (increase of 30)

In hospitals :

- hospitalised : 8 536 (decrease of 152)
- new patients hospitalised : 152 (increase of 50)
- returned home : 76 274 (increase of 275)
- in intensive care : 602 (decrease of 17)
- new patients in intensive care : 8 (decrease of 7)
- died in hospital : 19 346 (increase of 21)

In care homes & elsewhere :

- confirmed cases : 38 107 (increase of 112)
- died : 10 497 (increase of 9)

Source 30.06.20 : <https://www.gouvernement.fr/info-coronavirus/carte-et-donnees>

The various graphs indicate a continued decline across all results in France since the peaks between the end of March and the middle of April. The figures demonstrate that the epidemic in France is clearly under control and stable.

To evaluate how France has suffered worldwide and with respect to other European countries, the WHO tables and graphs at <https://covid19.who.int/> provide a useful reference. Although these don't precisely tally with the French government statistics, they do allow a simplified comparison between countries assuming the figures have corresponding levels of inaccuracy.

Since the last briefing three weeks ago on 9<sup>th</sup> June there has been a 3 million increase (45%) of reported cases to more than 10 million worldwide with the concentration still in the Americas north and south, but also with significant increases in Russia and India. In the same period, the worldwide death toll due to Covid-19 has risen by 99 466 (24.6%) to 503 862 deaths (4.9% of cases resulting in death, a rate marginally less than 3 weeks ago).

The Americas now account for 5 136 705 confirmed cases being just over 50% of the worldwide total. The total number of deaths recorded in the Americas is now 247 129 deaths being 49% of the worldwide total.

Worldwide, USA tops the WHO list with 2 537 636 confirmed cases resulting in 126 203 deaths (5.0% of cases resulting in death). Now there is a resurgence of the epidemic in several states, notably Florida, Texas, California and Arizona and lockdown easing is having to be reversed. The situation there remains very unstable.

Brazil remains second on the WHO list having declared more than twice as many cases in the last three weeks at 1 344 143 cases resulting in 57 622 deaths (4.3% of cases resulting in death), another huge increase in the past three weeks (+652 385 confirmed cases & +21 167 deaths).

Russia is now third on the WHO list with 647 849 confirmed cases resulting in 9 320 deaths (1.4% of cases resulting in death). India is in fourth place with 566 840 confirmed cases resulting in 16 893 deaths (3.0% of cases resulting in death, the eighth highest death toll worldwide). Mexico is placed seventh on the death toll list with 26 648 deaths for only 216 852 confirmed cases, quite a high mortality rate of 12.2% of cases resulting in death.

Europe has now suffered 2 692 086 confirmed cases, 26.4% of the world total down from 33% three weeks ago. UK still has the highest number of confirmed cases of Covid-19 in Europe with 311 969 (now fifth on the worldwide list after USA, Brazil, Russia & India), resulting in the highest number of deaths in Europe with 43 575 (14.0% of cases resulting in death).

This means that, in terms of deaths resulting from Covid-19 infection, UK now has the third highest mortality rate in the world behind USA & Brazil.

As in the previous briefing, the summary of the five major European economies worst affected, showing population, confirmed Covid-19 cases, deaths due to Covid-19, percentage of deaths

compared to confirmed cases, number of deaths per hundred thousand of the population, listed in order from the highest to the lowest number of confirmed cases of Covid-19, are :

- UK : 66.7 million / 311 969 cases / 43 575 deaths / 14.0% / 65 deaths per 100K
- Spain : 45.7 million / 248 970 cases / 28 346 deaths / 11.4% / 62 deaths per 100K
- Italy : 60.0 million / 240 436 cases / 34 744 deaths / 14.5% / 58 deaths per 100K
- Germany : 81.5 million / 194 259 cases / 8 973 deaths / 4.6% / 11 deaths per 100K
- France : 65.8 million / 156 930 cases / 29 730 deaths / 18.9% / 45 deaths per 100K

The trend stays fairly constant country by country in the number of deaths resulting from confirmed cases. France has the worst record with just under 19% but the statistic comparing deaths related to population size, UK has the worst record increasing to 65 deaths per 100K. Though, as commented before, not too much should be read into these comparative figures as countries adopt different reporting criteria.

The main point to retain is that the figures are slowing in Europe with almost identical returns to before except in UK where the pandemic is still having a big impact, not helped by celebrity footballers enjoying illegal parties, even while the Prime Minister is attempting to relaunch the economy with significant infrastructure spending as announced today. Though comparing it with Franklin Delano Roosevelt's "New Deal" back in 1933 seems to be stretching reality a bit far. Easing lockdowns to concentrate on rebuilding economies seems appropriate whilst maintaining vigilance and precautionary measures to avoid any resurgence.

There have also been public demonstrations in France during the past three weeks in support of the "Black Lives Matter" movement but the initiative to topple offensive statues has not materialised. Although France has its own murky colonial past and gained significant wealth from the slave trade, Bordeaux & Nantes in particular were greatly expanded and developed by this activity, there don't appear to be many statues anywhere celebrating individuals who made fortunes out of this business, at least not that offend the sensibilities of the French.

Most statues I have come across in my travels through the country seem to come from an earlier period in French history but perhaps the Revolution two hundred and thirty years ago sufficiently expunged offensive effigies from the public domain. Maybe also, the French now have other priorities to consider and pertain to Winston Churchill's view that "a nation that forgets its past has no future". If all controversial periods of any country's history were to be airbrushed out of textbooks, there would not be much left to read about and learn from mistakes as perceived in today's politically correct climate.

The apathy of the electorate in France as demonstrated last Sunday indicates there are significant issues to be dealt with here to win back the trust of the people and solving the pandemic crisis seems like a good place to start. That battle so far appears to be successful.

*William Powles / IESF BS / 30.06.2020*

*NB : numbers & percentages quoted from sources given in the text*