

# Global Britain Briefing Note

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## La Grande Nation

*The French ruling class has already “integrated” Brexit  
into its geopolitical assumptions*

One of the good things about living in Britain is that another wonderful country is just on our doorstep: France.

France's economic and political travails are well known. They will pass. Meanwhile, the real France, visible in so many ways, continues. Here, in no particular order, are just a few examples:-

***Local democracy*** Every town, village and hamlet in France has a mayor and councillors directly elected by residents. This may be why most French towns, villages and hamlets are so well run. (At regional and national levels one can argue there's too much democracy, but that's another story.) Vigorous local democracy may also help to explain French citizens' confidence in and support, despite its many defects, for their state: “l'Etat”.

***Television & Radio*** French television – both the state & private channels - is going through a golden age: zippy, adventurous, informative, enquiring, funny, serious, irreverent. Current affairs/politics are treated at length & in depth, “*C'est dans l'air*” on TV5 and documentaries on LCP and the Franco-German channel Arte being notable examples. Radio, on both the state & private stations, is similarly impressive. The same can be said of partially-subsidised French cinema, which, in the context of the current EU negotiations on the Trans-Atlantic Trade & Investment Treaty, France is rightly determined to protect.

***Provincial museums*** Dozens of provincial museums – in Aix-en-Provence and Rouen to mention just two – have extraordinary collections of painting & sculpture – and you don't have to queue to get in. Hundreds more, specialising in clocks or porcelain or sea-shells or whatever, are sprinkled liberally throughout the Hexagon.

***Health service*** Quite simply superb, as any Brit who has had to use it knows.

**Road network** Impressive: not just the motorways but the *routes nationales* & *routes départementales* as well.

**Mathematicians** French ones are second only to Americans as winners of the Fields Prize, the equivalent of the Nobel for that discipline.

**Urbanisme** The French meaning goes beyond that of “town planning” to include street furniture, road signs, flower displays, restored buildings & facades, trams and buses, lighting, pedestrian precincts, markets etc etc - everything that makes their cities a pleasure to be in.

**Armed & Special Forces** Gaullist traditions of national independence tend to inform the deployment of French forces. Their recent success (against jihadists in Mali, and rebels in the Central African Republic), and the decision not to join Blair & Bush in invading Iraq, are two examples. The jury is still out on their (and the UK’s) role in Afghanistan & Libya.

**Emergency Services** Outstanding - a mixture of full-time professionals and volunteers.

**French people** Contrary and contradictory: brilliant, inventive, courteous, highly-educated, hard-working, creative, diligent, wayward, disciplined, adventurous, cussed, intellectual, not afraid of *grands projets*.

## France & Europe: the Future

Supra-national European union may have looked like a good idea to many in France in the fifties and sixties (though not to General de Gaulle). Then, France was still recovering, psychologically and materially, from the Second World War, modernising its economy and grappling with painful de-colonisation. More than half a century on, French governments and the French electorate are disenchanted with the EU. France will not put up with Brussels for ever.

The French ruling class has already “integrated” Brexit - British exit from the EU - into its geopolitical assumptions. When the rest of the EU breaks up, France, by virtue of her history, her geography, her idea of herself, will be the central, indispensable core of whatever new “Europe” emerges. Once the EU goes, another type of European framework or structure or arrangement will come into being - looser than that of the EU. No other large country - not Italy, not Spain, not Poland - can re-invent a credible Continental successor grouping to the EU, not even, for well-known historical reasons, Germany. *La Grande Nation* is the only one that can undertake that task - with, one hopes, the wholehearted support - and participation - of the British.

# Global Britain

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