# Macron puts European journalists on the couch

PORTO, Portugal – [Epidemiologist-in-chief](https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-superhero-president-france-election-2022/), [think-tanker-in-chief](https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-think-tanker-in-chief/)and now shrink to the European press — there is apparently no end to French President Emmanuel Macron’s talents**.**

At an EU summit in the Portuguese city of Porto on Saturday, Macron decided reporters were in need of some analysis over their response to U.S. President Joe Biden’s call to waive coronavirus vaccine patents.

**“**I ask you the, European press, an almost psychological question,” said Macron, his voice growing animated in response to a reporter’s question about Biden’s move.

“When a year ago, we Europeans launched [ACT-A](https://www.who.int/initiatives/act-accelerator/faq) [a global scheme to fight the coronavirus], you didn’t say ‘Oh, you Europeans have the moral leadership! And ah, the U.S. isn’t following you!’” Macron said.

“And when the U.S. follows us, which is in fact what is happening … you say ah, the U.S. has the leadership!” Macron said.

In fact, the reluctance of the United States under Donald Trump’s presidency to get involved in global initiatives to tackle the pandemic was widely reported. In an [interview](https://www.politico.eu/article/melinda-gates-european-leaders-understand-need-for-global-cooperation-coronavirus-covid19/) with POLITICO published last year, Melinda Gates said it was European leaders who understood the need for global cooperation.

But why let the published record get in the way of a good psychoanalysis?

“You’re giving me the impression that you are waking up, you didn’t follow the movie,” Macron went on, visibly irked. “I can’t treat your complexes, I don’t have any.”

In recent days, Macron has seemed increasingly exasperated with comparisons to the Biden administration. He has repeatedly insisted to reporters that it is the U.S. playing catch-up on climate, on vaccine solidarity, and on fighting online hate speech and terror content.

Not that he has any kind of complex, of course.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/macron-puts-eu-press-on-the-couch/>

# French conservatives reeling after Macron’s kiss of death

PARIS — France’s conservatives have been thrown into crisis after a regional president broke ranks to form an alliance with President Emmanuel Macron’s party.

Renaud Muselier, the president of the southern Provence-Alpes-Côte d’Azur region, is expected to run for re-election in June on a joint ticket with Macron’s La République En Marche (LREM) party.

Under the deal, [brokered](https://www.lejdd.fr/Politique/exclusif-jean-castex-dit-oui-a-renaud-muselier-pour-une-candidature-commune-lrem-lr-dans-la-region-paca-4042256) by Prime Minister Jean Castex on Sunday, LREM will withdraw its own candidate for the election.

The move stunned the conservative Les Républicains, the once-dominant political force that has been struggling to rebuild after a crushing defeat in the last presidential election.

François Baroin, the Les Républicain mayor of Troyes, [reportedly told Muselier](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/elections/regionales/regionales-en-paca-amis-malfaisants-balle-dans-la-tete-de-la-droite-les-republicains-discutent-du-cas-muselier-lors-d-une-reunion-animee_4610615.html) that he should not “put a bullet in the head of the right.”

Analysts saw the maneuver as an effort by Macron’s camp, which was initially seen as centrist, to claim more political territory on the right, leaving the far right led by Marine Le Pen as his only significant opposition on that side of the spectrum.

“It’s a knockout blow from Emmanuel Macron, who is trying to destroy the right,” said Stéphane Zumsteeg, a pollster from Ipsos. “He is trying to confuse the voters and eat up all the space between him and Marine Le Pen.”

Polls predict Macron will likely face [Le Pen](https://www.politico.eu/article/marine-le-pens-national-rally-candidate-president-france-2022/) in the second round of the next presidential election in 2022.

“This is a political move from En Marche because they know they have failed and don’t have any candidates,” said Christian Jacob, president of Les Républicains, earlier Tuesday. “They are plotting against us and we have to dodge their attacks.”

Les Républicains heavyweights briefly considered backing a rival candidate against Muselier, before settling for assurances from him that the scope of the alliance with the president’s party would be limited.

On Tuesday evening, it was not clear how many LREM members would be joining Muselier’s list of candidates.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-conservatives-renaud-muselier-jean-castex-alliance-republicains-lrem/>

# France faces possible coronavirus vaccine glut

PARIS — France’s health minister announced Friday that overweight and diabetic patients will be eligible for the coronavirus vaccine from Saturday amid concerns that stocks of doses were pilling up.

The apparent mismatch between supply and demand has raised questions among local officials and doctors about the government's rollout strategy.

According to popular COVID tracking website *[Vitemadose](https://vitemadose.covidtracker.fr/" \t "_blank)*, there are over 280,000 vaccination appointments that remain unclaimed across France. The government [has disputed the figure](https://www.politico.eu/newsletter/playbook-paris/politico-playbook-paris-macron-dans-la-pqr-les-generaux-rhabilles-dallas-en-paca/) but has yet to provide a corrected one.

France is expecting to receive an extra delivery of 7.5 million doses from Pfizer, bringing the total number of BioNTech/Pfizer doses expected in France to 30 million over the next two months.

To manage the increase in deliveries, France has opened large-scale vaccination centers across the country called vaccinodromes.

Vaccination centers in Paris, Cannes and Grenoble have started offering slots to people who are not officially eligible for vaccinations. In other centers in Paris, Bordeaux and Angers, there were slots available within the next 24 hours that had not been taken.

This week, French Prime Minister Jean Castex defended the government's strategy.

“It’s true that we have a number of appointments that are not taken, but the figures should not be exaggerated. [Our strategy] works, we target the most vulnerable patients and we are advancing toward our goals,” he told reporters on Wednesday. According to government figures, over 4 million people, who are in the most vulnerable categories, have yet to get a jab.

Currently vulnerable patients with certain conditions and citizens over the age of 55 are eligible for vaccinations.

Meanwhile, President Emmanuel Macron has announced a [timetable for the lifting of further lockdown restrictions](https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/3031815-20210429-coronavirus-emmanuel-macron-devoile-deconfinement-quatre-etapes-fin-juin). Cafe terraces, museums, cinemas and nonessential shops are expected to reopen by May 19.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-coronavirus-vaccine-glut/>

# Barnier will decide on French presidential run ‘in the fall’

PARIS — Michel Barnier hinted at a 2022 run for the French presidency in an interview with weekly magazine [Le Point](https://www.lepoint.fr/politique/exclusif-presidentielle-2022-michel-barnier-j-ai-envie-28-04-2021-2424208_20.php?utm_term=Autofeed&utm_medium=Social&utm_source=Twitter&Echobox=1619628215#xtor=CS1-32-%5BEchobox%5D) on Wednesday.

Barnier, the EU’s former chief Brexit negotiator, said he would make clear his presidential intentions “in the fall,” in an interview titled “I want to…”

Barnier, who was speaking ahead of the release of his book “The Great Illusion,” has been touted as one of several options for the center-right party Les Républicains (LR), though the favorites remain Bruno Retailleau, Valérie Pécresse and Xavier Bertrand.

LR remains undecided on how to make the pick, debating whether to choose a primary-style system or simply back a so-called “natural” candidate, although the latter option would depend on the results of June’s regional elections.

Pécresse and Bertrand are both regional leaders seeking re-election, but Bertrand has already announced he will run for president no matter who his former party chooses to support (he left LR in 2017 but has been touted for a return).

Barnier would rather avoid a primary, arguing the party’s 2016 primary race was the “origin of divisions and personal resentment” between competitors.

In February, Barnier [launched a group called Patriot and European](https://www.politico.eu/article/michel-barnier-gathers-allies-support-national-ambitions/) to gather like-minded lawmakers. “I have a number of ideas and proposals to make, on all issues,” Barnier told [France Info](https://www.francetvinfo.fr/replay-radio/le-brief-politique/presidentielle-2022-michel-barnier-remplit-son-agenda-parisien_4280329.html) at the time, including “the authority of the State, decentralization and environment-friendly growth.”

Pushed on his divergences with Emmanuel Macron in the Le Point interview, Barnier, a former foreign minister and agriculture minister, questioned whether some of the president’s pre-pandemic fiscal measures had been fully understood, and said he would prefer lowering taxes on production, to make French businesses more competitive.

On Tuesday, Barnier was invited to the European Parliament as MEPs prepared to ratify the EU-U.K. trade deal that he negotiated.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/barnier-will-decide-in-the-fall-about-presidential-run/>

# France struggles to come to terms with fallout from Jewish pensioner’s murder

PARIS — A controversial murder case in which the drug-fueled killer of a Jewish pensioner was ruled unfit to stand trial has rocked France, raised concerns about growing anti-Semitism and pitted the president against senior members of the judiciary.

Earlier this month, judges at France’s highest court ruled that in April 2017, Kobili Traoré killed 65-year-old Sarah Halimi while suffering a “delirious fit” fueled by heavy cannabis use and was unaware of what he was doing, and therefore did not have to face trial.

The decision has sparked a wave of public protest across France, with President Emmanuel Macron calling for [the law to be changed](https://www.lefigaro.fr/actualite-france/emmanuel-macron-au-figaro-je-me-bats-pour-le-droit-a-la-vie-paisible-20210418). On Sunday, thousands of protesters gathered in Paris to demand justice for Halimi.

Macron’s stance has in turn infuriated magistrates who say meddling politicians are a threat to judicial independence. The government [is aiming to](https://twitter.com/E_DupondM/status/1386277631197388800) introduce a new bill on the matter by end of May.

“Deciding to take drugs and subsequently become ‘like crazy’ should not in my opinion abolish criminal responsibility,” Macron said.

Members of the Jewish community in France say the no-trial is the latest blow after a series of high-profile attacks against Jews.

“The relatives are angry, but I won’t lie to you, they were not surprised by the ruling,” said Gilles-William Goldnadel, lawyer for Halimi’s sister Esther Lekover. “We have become used to the justice system being in denial [about anti-Semitism].”

The Halimi case was only belatedly labeled an anti-Semitic attack.

In a recent book, several public figures say Halimi’s death is an example of a [new type of anti-Semitism](https://www.la-croix.com/Religion/Islam/Sarah-Halimi-victime-nouvel-antisemitisme-2018-04-25-1200934402) in France, fueled by radical Islamism. Several attacks in the last few years have specifically targeted the Jewish community — although the book’s theory itself is controversial [among scholars](http://www.slate.fr/story/164336/societe-nouvel-antisemitisme-france-ouvrage-manifeste-musulman-gauche-conspirationnisme-islamophobie-theorie-complot-deni-realite).

Macron has vowed to fight what he calls Islamist separatism in France, pushing three bills on security through parliament in the last year. New measures include additional restrictions on wearing religious signs for public service employees, new online hate speech offenses, and stricter checks on the foreign financing of mosques.

With presidential elections looming next year, observers say Macron is seeking to occupy ground covered by the far-right’s Marine Le Pen, who [has blamed the rise of radical Islamism](https://www.20minutes.fr/societe/2137323-20170922-meurtre-sarah-halimi-pen-felicite-caractere-antisemite-retenu) for the Halimi case and other anti-Semitic crimes. The far-right leader, who has tried hard in recent years to distance herself from her father [Jean-Marie](https://www.politico.eu/article/jean-marie-le-pen-front-national-france-court-upholds-fine-against-jean-marie-le-pen-for-holocaust-remark/), who repeatedly denied the Holocaust, has been trying to position herself as a defender of the Jewish community.

Members of the French justice system say the courts never denied the attack against Halimi was anti-Semitic, but ultimately ruled that the perpetrator was not in the state of mind to stand trial.

Source: <https://www.politico.eu/article/france-anti-semitism-murder-sarah-halimi/>

# Najat Vallaud-Belkacem: France's first female Education Minister is making her mark

France's first female Education Minister placed herself firmly at the centre of the controversy around the string of “burkini bans” in the country when she spoke out in strong terms against the restrictions.

Moroccan-born Najat Vallaud-Belkacem, who describes herself as a “non-practicing Muslim”, described the prohibition of burkinis as “a threat to individual freedoms”.

Speaking to French radio channel E1 Matin, the politician said that while she was against women being forced to wear the burkini, she strongly opposed the bans on modest swimwear that have swept across French cities and communes during this summer.

“If you’re asking me in a general context whether I’m for or against the burkini, the response is simple: I oppose the burkini. I think you know my feminist convictions and know that my dream is a society where women are free to do what they like,” she said.

“But if you ask me whether I agree with the polemic against the burkini in the past week, the response is no. Definitely not.”

Ms Vallaud-Belkacem continued: “I think at this serious time, post-attacks, when many French people are worried, you shouldn’t add fuel to the fire. You should be appeasing people as much as possible, not stigmatising them. The ban of the burkini puts into question people's individual freedoms."

Her words provoked a vicious backlash from the French Prime Minister Manuel Valls, who said the comments were “a bad interpretation” of the ban, insisting the measures were “taken in the name of public order”.

Source: https://www.independent.co.uk/news/people/najat-vallaud-belkacem-france-politics-burkini-a7214456.html