French Minister of Defense Visits the United States


The French minister met with several high-ranking US officials during his stay in the nation’s capital, including Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, and William Cohen, former defense secretary under the Clinton administration.

During their meeting, Secretary Gates and Minister Morin discussed issues ranging from the situations in Afghanistan and Iran, military-to-military relationships between France and the U.S., and the relationship between NATO and the European Union.

To complement those discussions, Minister Morin and Secretary Gates hosted a joint press conference at the Pentagon on January 31, where the renewed relationship between France and the U.S. was palpable. Minister Morin conveyed his gratitude “as a Frenchman, and as a Normand,” describing how much he “worships the white crosses that are in all the American cemeteries along the coast of Normandy,” and added that “the blood-links uniting the United States and France are much more powerful than the discrepancies we might have experienced.” The French-American alliance, forged over 200 years ago, continues to this day: Secretary Gates expressed his appreciation for President Sarkozy’s commitment to NATO.

Taking place one week before the NATO Defense Ministers’ Meeting in Vilnius, Lithuania, on February 7 and 8, the conference also addressed Afghanistan: “We need a comprehensive solution [that] is political and economic,” emphasized Morin, “to implement policies […] not to see only deployment of major resources, but also to establish true synergy [to bring] stability to the country.”

Minister Morin also held meetings on Capitol Hill with Senator Carl Levin, Chairman of the Armed Services Committee; Senator John Warner, Member and former chairman of the Armed Services Committee; and Senator Daniel Inouye, Chairman of the Senate Defense Appropriations Subcommittee (Senator Inouye was awarded the Legion of Honor by French President Nicolas Sarkozy in 2007 - see NFF 07.12). In addition, Mr. Morin met with members of the think tank community during a lunch that was organized by the Atlantic Council, as well as with French expatriates and members of the French press.

The French minister also honored US Army Chief of Staff General George W. Casey, as well as two other American WWII veterans, Joseph L. Argenzio of Company M of the 16th Infantry, and Harold W. Hayward, of the 76th Tank Battalion, by bestowing upon them the Legion of Honor at the Residence of France. Casey received the rank of “Commander,” and Argenzio and Hayward were awarded that of “Knight.”

“Although the times and circumstances under which they served were different,” Minister Morin declared, addressing the honorees and their friends and family during the ceremony, “they epitomize the best qualities of a soldier: unconditional sense of duty to their country, in defense of the universal ideals of liberty, freedom and democracy, as well as unswerving courage and dedication.”

Before leaving D.C., Minister Morin conveyed France’s respect to American soldiers. The French defense minister laid a wreath at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier during a ceremony at Arlington National Cemetery, while the Band of the Washington Military District played both the American and French national anthems. Small detachments representing the five services of the United States armed forces, including one carrying the flags of the different branches of service, stood at attention on both sides of the tomb throughout the ceremony.

French Forces Evacuate Foreigners from Chad

The French armed forces played a vital role in evacuating foreign nationals from Chad’s embattled capital, N’djama. As of February 8, 1,389 people had been transferred, upon their request, from N’djama to Libreville, Gabon, via French military transports. Among them were 537 French nationals and 852 citizens from other nationalities, including 69 Americans. Led by the crisis cell of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Quai d’Orsay), the operation was coordinated on the ground by the French armed forces. French troops currently in the field number 1,450, mostly from the French Elements in Chad (EFT). They helped regroup and evacuate foreign nationals from N’djama in often perilous conditions. Departure from N’djama to Libreville was made thanks to six C-160 Transall and C-130 Hercules airplanes.
France’s Alstom Rolls Out New High-Speed Train

French company Alstom, a world leader in transport and energy infrastructure, unveiled its newest generation of high-speed trains, the AGV, on February 5, at the company’s transport plant in La Rochelle, western France. At the inaugural ceremony, President Nicolas Sarkozy cut the ribbon on the Automotrice à Grande Vitesse (AGV — High-Speed Automotive).

After ten years of research and development, the company has produced the AGV prototype that can reach 224 mph (360 km/h) in regular commercial use, 25 mph (40 km/h) faster than its TGV predecessor, France’s current generation high-speed train developed in conjunction with the French rail operator SNCF.

In addition to its sleek, black-and-grey aerodynamic design, the AGV boasts an innovative, energy-efficient and ecologically-friendly operating mechanism. In terms of gas consumption, the AGV consumes three times less than a bus, eight times less than an automobile, and 15 times less than an airplane, per passenger. The AGV is the first train in the world to feature an articulated architecture that boasts a distributed drive system (motors that are located underneath individual cars), enhancing performance and increasing the space available to accommodate up to 650 additional passengers on board by eliminating the need for locomotives. The unique design cuts energy consumption by 15 percent over its main competitors, and reduces maintenance costs. Constructed out of a lighter composite material than the TGV, the train itself is 98 percent recyclable.

Responsible for the construction of over 70 percent of the world’s fastest trains, Alstom and the French public rail agencies set a new speed record during a test run in spring 2007, when a train using AGV technology clocked in at 357.2 mph (574.8 km/h). With a 1.5 billion-euro contract already in the works with Italian rail operator NTV, Alstom’s AGV is also in the running, among other European competitors, to replace 300 to 400 of France’s older generation of trains, the TGV, a change scheduled for 2014. Built with the technology to travel on all European lines, the AGV hopes to expand its system to meet future demand in China, India, South Korea, Brazil, and the U.S.

Overseas Sec. of State Calls for Coral Reef Protection

Reaffirming France’s dedication to environmental protection, Secretary of State for Overseas Territories Christian Estrosi attended, on January 24, the International Coral Reef Initiative (ICRI) conference in Washington, D.C. Estrosi was present for the official launch of the International Year of the Reef (IYOR).

In a speech delivered at the conference, Secretary Estrosi called for the New Caledonia Barrier Reef, the second largest barrier reef in the world, to be named a UNESCO World Heritage Site. France’s overseas departments and collectivities (see NFF 07.12) — including New Caledonia, a French overseas collectivity east of Australia — are home to 10 percent of the planet’s coral reefs. Overall, France’s territorial waters and Exclusive Economic Zones cover 4,260,000 square miles (8 percent of the world’s Exclusive Economic Zones), second only to the United States.

For more information on the initiative, please visit www.outre-mer.gouv.fr.

New French Military Base to Open in Abu Dhabi

French President Nicolas Sarkozy signed an agreement on January 15 to establish a permanent strategic military base in the United Arab Emirates.

France will set up a military base in the Persian Gulf by 2009, close to Abu-Dhabi. Approximately 500 military personnel will be stationed there to further strengthen bilateral military activities with the United Arab Emirates and to support the French Forces transiting through the region.

The base’s infrastructures will be designed to host and support, on the logistical and technical levels, the French navy ships that are deployed to the region on a permanent basis. The base will also support the French air force and army units frequently deployed to United Arab Emirates.

This decision is part of a regional strategic partnership and meets France’s need to have a continuous presence in a region where French national interests are paramount.
France's Vélo'V Inspires Bike-Sharing in Philadelphia

Anyone familiar with the French can attest to their affinity for two-wheeled vehicles. Motorized scooters flood the city streets and every year France hosts the Tour de France, the most famous bicycle race in the world.

Recently, another French cycle craze — bike sharing — has picked up momentum in the States. On January 17, Philadelphia hosted an international forum on bike sharing to generate public support for environmentally friendly and healthy personal mobility. Community activist Russell Meddin, along with Bicycle Coalition, Urban Sustainability Forums, and PhilyCarShare, organized the symposium that attracted over 400 attendees to the Academy of Natural Sciences.

While visiting France in the fall of 2006, Meddin was intrigued by the accessibility and ingenuity of the Vélo’V program, a bike-share initiative originating in Lyon that later inspired the Vélib’ program implemented in Paris (see NFF 07.10). For the Philadelphia symposium, Meddin, along with former Honorary French Consul to Philadelphia, Danièle Thomas Easton, helped recruit Gilles Vesco, vice president of the Urban Community of Lyon, to speak about the success of the Vélo’V and inspire the City of Brotherly Love to push forward with efforts to start its own program. "France allowing Gilles Vesco to come speak to us was truly the spark that ignited the storm of interest now sweeping across Philadelphia," declared Meddin. “The time is ripe,” confirms Easton, Philadelphia City Council, in its first 2008 Session, passed a resolution to hold hearings to investigate the creation of a public-use bicycle program.

Presently, over 60 cities worldwide have adopted their own versions of the French cycle trend. In Philadelphia, Meddin hopes the bike-share program will help solve problems like heavy traffic and polluted air. Ideally, he describes, it would fit seamlessly into the existing public transportation system: "You get out of the subway and pick up a bicycle to transfer to a bus or get to a final destination."

For more information, please visit: www.bikesharephilly.org.

"Jeanne d'Arc" Makes Port of Visit in New York

The French navy training squadron composed of the helicopter carrier "Jeanne d'Arc" and the destroyer "Georges Leygues," which departed from Brest on December 15, 2007, made a port of call at the New York City Cruise Terminal in Manhattan from December 28 to January 2, 2008. The French midshipmen on board facilitated the distribution of 10,000 French books, including dictionaries, textbooks, novels and comic books, to underprivileged children participating in New York City’s newly launched French-English dual-language programs, as well as to New Orleans schools devastated by hurricane Katrina (See NFF 07.13). Sixty of the 80 crates remained in New York, while the rest were shipped overland to New Orleans.

Since 1964, the squadron’s primary mission has been to provide the initial training at sea received by the cadets from the French Naval Academy, the Naval Supply Corps, the Maritime Affairs Corps and the Uniformed School of Medicine. A limited number of foreign cadets are also trained on board.

The training is essentially based on the practical, active observation and involvement of the cadets in all activities of the ships, giving them a hands-on professional knowledge, as well as a reinforced sense of responsibility that will be essential to their future career as officers.

FACC Honors Thain and Théodore as “Persons of the Year”

The New York chapter of the French-American Chamber of Commerce (FACC) honored John A. Thain, former chief executive officer, and Jean-François Théodore, deputy chief executive officer of NYSE Euronext, at the 2007 “Person of the Year” award ceremony on November 15. Launched on April 4, 2007, the holding company NYSE Euronext is the product of a merger between the New York Stock Exchange, then headed by Thain, and Euronext N.V., led by Théodore. The resulting unification created the world’s largest and most liquid exchange group. At the 24th annual gala held at the Waldorf-Astoria Hotel in New York City, the FACC recognized the efforts made by both gentlemen in strengthening the French-American economic alliance and boosting the global capital market. Among the evening’s distinguished guests were the Ambassador of France to the United States, Pierre Vimont; and president of the French-American Chamber of Commerce, Serge Bellanger. Ambassador Vimont characterized NYSE Euronext in the context of French-American partnership as "the best illustration of the spectacular performance France and the United States can give when they join forces and start joint ventures and joint enterprises." For more information, please visit: www.ccifc.org/usa/new_york.

EXPLORING THE HISTORY OF "THE PARIS OF THE WEST"

A new book by French historian Claudine Chalmers, Ph.D., explores France’s influence on the development of San Francisco’s cultural identity. The book, "French San Francisco," is the result of Chalmers’s extensive research on the history of French pioneers in California. Dating back to its early days as a Gold Rush town from the goldfields to the streets of San Francisco, the latter has enjoyed long-lasting cultural and economic ties to France and has been a sister-city of Paris since 1996. Chalmers chronicles early forays into the remote new territory and follows their trail from the wilderness to the City by the Bay. French culture continues to permeate San Francisco today, most notably in architecture and food. For example, there are over eighty French restaurants within the city’s 47 square miles, as well as French-style boulangeries (bakeries) and cheese shops. San Francisco’s palpable Parisian feel has earned the city the nickname, "Paris of the West."

NEWS FROM FRANCE

Mardi Gras Draws Revelers Throughout the States

Midnight on February 5 marked the end of Mardi Gras celebrations this year, and the carnival famous for its revelry did not disappoint. Also known as "Fat Tuesday," Mardi Gras is a festival traditionally celebrated by Roman Catholics who indulged in favorite foods before the beginning of the penitential Lenten period the following day. Contemporary Mardi Gras celebrations often last a week; festivities include extravagant parades, costume balls, musical performances, and more. The first American Mardi Gras celebration took place on March 3, 1699, near present-day New Orleans, a city that has since become famous for this celebration. The 2008 festivities began on January 25 and lasted ten days, with over fifty parades inspired by themes from Greek mythology and ancient heroes. North of the Big Easy, Chicago participated in the Mardi Gras action with a day-long carnival hosted by the Alliance Française. The kid-friendly celebration included mask-making, magic shows, and a parade.

"Revelers celebrate Mardi Gras in New Orleans in colorful tones."

© Scott Ellis
FRENCH MILITARY PRESENCE IN AFGHANISTAN

French forces play a key role today in Afghanistan, with a total strength of about 2,000 soldiers, airmen and sailors.

ISAF and OEF

France has contributed to operations in Afghanistan from the very outset, both in the US-led Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and NATO’s International Security Assistance Force (ISAF). It was in command of ISAF for six months in 2004 and of the Kabul region (RC-C) from September 2006 to April 2007. A 200-strong Special Forces contingent operated in the southern and eastern regions alongside US Forces from 2003 to February 2007.

New Commitments

French President Nicolas Sarkozy has decided that France will remain committed to Afghanistan for "as long as necessary." The following were decided or confirmed:

- The authorization for French troops to intervene on an as-needed basis outside Kabul to assist allies in difficulty (this was first announced at the NATO summit in Riga, November 2006)

- The deployment of three additional Operational Monitoring and Liaison Teams with the Afghan Army. As of January 2008, four French OMLTs (200 troops) are operating in Afghanistan

- The transfer of the French Air Force Detachment from Central Asia to Kandahar

- The deployment of a fifth OMLT of about 80 soldiers in support of the Dutch Forces in Uruzgan

- French-German cooperation aimed at setting up Afghan Military Schools for Logistics and Engineering.
As of January 2008, the French presence is as follows:

**Land Forces: 1,210**

- 950 troops in Kabul (one Battalion, one medical group)
- Four OMLTs (200 troops, attached to the 201 Afghan National Army Corps)
- 40 troops with the Afghan Army Training Unit (Operation EPIDOTE). Since 2002, more than 5,000 Afghan officers have been trained
- 20 Special Forces trainers responsible for the Afghan Commando School.

**Air Forces: 400**

- Combat Air Unit in Kandahar (three Mirage F1-CR; three Mirage 2000-D) in support of ISAF missions
- Air Transport Unit in Dushanbe, Tajikistan, and Manas, Kyrgyzstan (two C-160, one C-135)
- Two helicopters in Kabul.

(The Air Wing of the Nuclear Aircraft Carrier Charles de Gaulle regularly reinforces this contribution.)

**Naval Forces: 400**

- Contribution to the naval component of OEF (CTF-150): one Frigate (Guépratte), one Aviso (Commandant Ducuing) and one maritime patrol aircraft.

The French military contribution to Afghanistan comes on top of numerous overseas commitments. Today 16,500 troops are stationed in French overseas territories, 5,500 are deployed to implement bilateral defense agreements, and 10,500 participate in overseas operations (including Afghanistan, but also Lebanon, Côte d’Ivoire, Bosnia, Kosovo, Chad, CAR, etc.). France will be the main contributor to the European Force that will deploy in eastern Chad and CAR to secure humanitarian operations for refugees from Darfur and IDPs.
France is a founding member of NATO. It is a major contributor to NATO activities: current operations (Afghanistan, Kosovo, Strategic Reserve), budget, and transformation (in particular the NATO Response Force).

Although not a member of the Nuclear Planning Group (NPG) nor of the Defense Planning Committee (DPC), France participates in all major decision-making bodies of the Alliance, including the NATO Allied Council and the Military Committee.

France is among the five leading troop contributors to NATO operations.

France is an active participant in NATO’s various operations:

- In Kosovo, with 2,300 troops in KFOR, France is the fourth-largest contributor after the United States, Germany and Italy
- France has 1,600 soldiers and airmen in Afghanistan in the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), mostly in Kabul and Kandahar. Outside NATO, French training and naval capabilities on the Afghan theater operate within the framework of Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF).
- Taking together all NATO operations, France is among the five leading troop contributors, with a total of nearly 4,000.

France is the third-largest contributor to the common budgets funding Alliance operations.

France makes the third-largest contribution (12.87%) to the budgets for all the Alliance's operations and military missions.

France’s financial contribution to ISAF is also the third-largest contribution from an Alliance nation, after the United States and Germany.
France is providing on average 13% of the manpower of the NATO Response Force (NRF).

France contributes to every NRF rotation (every six months). It is one of the four leading contributors:

- French contribution to NRF 10 (until mid-2008): 1,800 troops (6.5%), 14 planes, 2 Frigates, 2 mine-hunters, 1 submarine, 1 maritime patrol aircraft.

- French contribution to NRF 11 (from mid-2008 to Dec 08): 7,150 troops (26.5%), 17 planes, 1 helicopter-carrying frigate, 2 mine-hunters and 2 maritime patrol aircraft.

French forces had to perform numerous riot-control tasks in Kosovo.

French soldiers brief a multinational NATO team on operations tactics.

French is actively involved in NATO's transformation.

France is making an essential contribution to defining the main choices regarding the development of the Alliance's activities.

It has opted, in addition to participation in the operations, to be present in the new structures through which NATO is being modernized (Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk, VA, and NATO Response Force). France also contributes to the transformation of the Alliance and its military forces toward a more expeditionary mindset: it established in Lille a High Readiness Force Headquarters recently certified by NATO.

Facts on Allied defense effort (2007):

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Military manpower</th>
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<tr>
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<tr>
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<td>Germany</td>
<td>250,000</td>
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<tr>
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French Culture Sweeps the States in 2008

With 2008 well under way, Francophiles in the U.S. can begin to mark up their calendars with a plethora of events promoting cross-cultural appreciation. Celebrations of French culture are sweeping through the States, offering a vast array of arts, literature, music, film and fun à la française. From musical fêtes in Kalamazoo, MI, to the largest French film festival in the U.S., the 2008 French cultural program is sure to educate, inspire and delight.

Arts and Literature

Touring the U.S. in fall 2008, the Cultures Urbaines Festival (Urban Cultures Festival) brings together internationally acclaimed artists from French and American metropolitan centers. The festival opens in New York City in October and will travel across the United States, exhibiting works that have emerged from the creative minds of these cities over the last fifteen years. In addition to displaying artwork, the festival will mark an artistic exchange of both aesthetic and political viewpoints on issues relevant to the arts scene in the U.S. and abroad.

Also this fall, the New York City Public Library will host the French Fiction Festival, a showcase of the best in contemporary French literature. Ten authors, including both emerging talents and writers well known on the international scene, will gather at the festival to take part in public debates, readings and performances. This year’s events will highlight the theme of liberty in its various incarnations. For more information on these events, please visit: www.frenchculture.org.

The theater world will be the stage for French-American artistic collaboration with the creation of the U.S. Kolèts Project at 7 Stages Theatre in Atlanta. To continue the legacy of French playwright Bernard-Marie Kolèts, 7 Stages will translate and produce six of his plays, all of which impart a French and global perspective of America. Beginning April 24, the theater will present In the Solitude of Cottonfields, with acclaimed Comédie Française director Eric Vigner. For more information, please visit: www.7stages.org.

Music

In the wake of Mardi Gras celebrations, francophiles in the U.S. can get a second boost of French culture when "Joe Dassin: The Great Musical Celebration" hits the States on February 16. Born in New York to expatriate parents, Dassin spent his childhood in California and moved to France in 1950. In the 1970s, Dassin topped the French charts with songs like "Les Champs-Élysées" and "Et si tu n’existais pas" ("And if you never existed"). A collaborative effort between Canadian producers and Dassin’s sons, the spectacle pays tribute to the French-American icon, who died of a heart attack in 1980. Featuring a team of over 30 dancers, singers and musicians, the show is making its way across the Atlantic in honor of Dassin’s Franco-American roots. Debuting in Boston, the tour will hit several major cities, including New York and Los Angeles with a grand finale in Chicago on March 2. For more information please visit: www.spectaclejoedassin.com.

To kick off the rainy month of March, the Festival de la Francophonie celebrates the linguistic and cultural diversity of over 200 million French speakers in 55 countries around the world. In cities like Boston, Chicago and Washington, D.C., the festival will consist of a week-long fête featuring wine, food, French conversation and a variety of musical performances by francophone artists from around the world, and more. "La Francophonie is a vibrant movement that promotes peace, solidarity and the dialogue of civilizations," declared Senegalese President Abdou Diouf, in recognition of the festival’s international spirit. For more information, please visit: www.af-chicago.org, www.consulfrance-boston.org, and www.francophonie.org.

Moving south, Louisiana will play host to the 22nd International de Louisiane, an annual celebration of the state’s French cultural heritage. From April 23-27, the historic downtown area of Lafayette will be transformed into an entertainment complex featuring six music stages, food vendors, street musicians, cultural workshops, international cooking demonstrations and music from around the world. Among the performers are the Babylon Circus and Samarabalouf from France, the MOOV Women’s Carnival of Martinique, Togo’s Brice Kapel and Habib Koité from Mali. For more information, please visit: www.festivalinternational.com.

At the onset of summer, the opportunity to take advantage of hundreds of free outdoor concerts in New York City, Kalamazoo, MI, and Washington, D.C., is music to the ears. On June 21, marking the summer solstice, these U.S. cities will join hundreds around the world in celebrating the annual Fête de la musique, a long-standing cultural tradition originating in France. In 1982, Paris hosted the first Fête, showcasing a diverse range of amateur and professional performers in free concerts throughout the city. Since its debut, this international music extravaganza has caught on in over 340 cities worldwide. At last year’s "Make Music New York," the Big Apple hosted over 1,500 performers in concerts throughout the five boroughs. For more information on the 2008 Fêtes, please visit: www.makemusicny.org, www.kalamazoojazzfete.de, and www.la-maison-francaise.org.

Cinema

From February 29 to March 9, New York’s Lincoln Center will host the 13th Annual Rendez-Vous with French Cinema. Organized by the Film Society of the Lincoln Center and co-sponsored by the French Cultural Services, this unique and popular event continuously draws a "who’s-who" of French film directors and actors. The festival features a diverse selection of contemporary French cinema and post-screening dialogues. This year’s program includes new films from acclaimed directors Cédric Klapisch and Claude Lelouch. For more information, please visit: www.filmlinc.com.

Also in March, Virginia Commonwealth University in Richmond, VA, presents its 16th annual French Film Festival March 28-30, the largest of its kind in the U.S. Sponsored by both French and American corporations, including TV5Monde and the Richmond Times-Dispatch, the festival pursues the dual goal of "promoting French language cinema and culture in the United States and creating a tradition of Franco-American corporate and cultural partnerships." Since 1996, the festival has hosted over 160 actors, directors and producers who show their films and participate in dialogue with audiences. Included in the program last year were feature films such as "Bamako" and short films such as "Coup de foudre" ("Love at First Sight"). For more information, please visit: www.frenchfilm.vcu.edu.

In our nation’s capital, La Maison Française at the French Embassy provides a monthly program of French films for all audiences. Twice a month, the Cinémathèque program offers a screening of contemporary French films that have received praise at film festivals in the States and abroad. Since January 2008, La Maison Française now caters to a younger audience with the brand new Ciné-Kids program, which shows critically acclaimed children’s films every other month. For more information, please visit: www.la-maison-francaise.org.
2007: A Record-Breaking Year for France

In 2007, Foreign Direct Investment in France increased 52 percent, and nearly 321,500 new business were formed.

In the past year, France broke its own records for the creation of new companies, foreign investment, and the reduction of carbon emissions. With nearly 321,500 businesses formed in 2007, France’s entrepreneurial spirit continues to rise. This figure represents a 12.5 percent increase over the previous year, and establishes a new record for the country. Such a phenomenon also bodes well for France’s economy as a whole. A recent study undertaken by INSEE (National Institute for Statistics and Economic Studies) shows that unemployed individuals are more likely to launch new businesses, thereby creating new jobs for themselves and others.

According to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), foreign investment in France reached new heights in 2007 as well. International investments boasted a 52 percent increase since 2006, breaking the record previously set in 2000. This increase establishes France as third in the world for international investments, following the United States and Britain.

Finally, Minister of Ecology Jean-Louis Borloo recently announced that France has reduced its carbon emission by 2.5 percent in the past year. As an additional testament to the country’s ecologically-friendly focus, France solidified its long-term environmental commitments with new goals to lower emissions by 40 percent in construction and by 20 percent in transportation by 2020 during the nationwide consultation Le Grenelle de l’Environnement, an environmental policy conference launched by President Sarkozy on May 21, 2007 (see NFF 07.11).

Electric Transatlantic Car Venture Picks Up Speed Internationally

French auto manufacturer Renault S.A. and partner Nissan Motor Company are launching a venture for battery-powered cars, creating, for the first time, the necessary conditions to allow such an endeavor to come to fruition. In 1999, the two companies formed the Renault-Nissan Alliance to expand their unique relationship: Renault holds a 44 percent equity stake in Nissan, whereas Nissan holds a 15 percent stake in Renault. In addition to sharing ownership, the two companies espouse common goals and principles as well as an interest in each other’s financial growth and success.

On January 21, the car companies announced their plan to introduce electric cars in Israel, along with 500,000 easily accessible hubs where drivers may replace and charge batteries. California-based Project Better Place will take a leading role in the project by developing and operating the nationwide network of battery-charging and replacement stations.

The endeavor represents a breakthrough global initiative toward reducing CO₂ emissions and developing renewable sources of energy. “We think we are near a mass-market solution,” affirmed Carlos Ghosn, chief executive officer of both Renault and Nissan. In the past, attempts to market battery-powered cars have been unsuccessful, since charging stations were not readily accessible to drivers. Under Renault-Nissan’s new business model, this will no longer be an issue. Vehicles come equipped with computer systems that show remaining battery power and indicate the nearest charging station.

High costs should no longer be a deterrent for customers either, thanks to tax incentives offered by the Israeli government. According to an article published in Business Wire, “the total cost of ownership for the customer will be significantly lower than that of a fuel-based car over the life cycle of the vehicle.” After the initial run in Israel, Renault-Nissan hopes to market electric cars in crowded cities such as Paris, London, and Yokohama, Japan. For more information, please visit www.renault.com.

“Incitement” To Be Eco-Friendly

On January 1, Le Grenelle de l’Environnement, an environmental consultative conference launched by President Sarkozy on May 21, 2007, in hopes of restructuring French environmental policies instituted its first concrete measure. The new mecanism, l’écopastille, encourages the purchase of environmentally friendly vehicles, and was announced on December 5, 2007, by Jean-Louis Borloo, Minister of Ecology and Sustainable Development and Planning; Christine Lagarde, Minister of Finance; and Eric Woerth, Minister of the Budget. It is estimated that approximately 25 percent of purchased new cars emit more than 160 grams of CO₂ per kilometer.

L’écopastille serves as an incentive-based device to encourage consumers to purchase new cars that emit less than 130 grams of CO₂-km by offering rewards and bonuses for their environmentally-friendly investment when they register their new cars for the first time. Additionally, those who also trade in their cars that are more than 15 years old are eligible to receive a “superbonus.” L’écopastille is purely incentive-based and does not place any additional levy on households or enterprises.

NEWS FROM FRANCE
France Boasts Europe's Highest Fertility Rate in 2007

New census figures released in January reveal that France had the highest fertility rates in Europe in 2007, averaging 1.98 children per woman. These figures rank France just ahead of Ireland with 1.90, and well above the European Union average of 1.52. France’s fertility rate has risen steadily since 1993, when the national average was 1.66 children per woman.

Public policies to alleviate financial burden are among the factors credited with encouraging family growth and boosting France’s fertility rate in the last year. For example, the French government provides universal public schooling for children starting at age three, as well as subsidies from the Caisse Nationale d’Allocations Familiales (National Office for Family Allocations, or CNAF), including financial aid for child care and family housing.

Overall, France’s population stands steady at 63.8 million as of January 1, growing by 360,000 since the previous census in 2007. This figure includes both mainland France and overseas departments.

In addition to boasting Europe’s highest fertility rates, French women also have the longest life expectancy (84.4 years) in Europe. French men followed their female counterparts with an expectancy of 77.5 years. Among the factors believed to contribute to French longevity are the country’s health care system, ranked in the top ten in the world by the World Health Organization, and social programs, including vacation packages that emphasize the importance of reducing stress and promoting “joie de vivre.”

Developing Environmentally Friendly Advertising

PricewaterhouseCoopers, Havas Media France, the LVMH Group, and the Agency for the Environment and the Conservation of Energy (ADEME) launched in January 2008 the first tool ever created to evaluate the impact of advertising on the environment. The evaluation mechanism, called EcoPublicité, elaborates on the work begun at Le Grenelle de l’Environnement, a consultative environmental conference, held in fall of 2007 (see NFF 07.11), where Minister of Ecology Jean-Louis Borloo affirmed that “responsible advertising is […] a key element of intelligent consumption.”

EcoPublicité integrates ecological awareness into advertising campaigns while simultaneously optimizing performance in the media of television, radio, press, and Internet. This tool will examine the effects of both producing and broadcasting advertisements by three main environmental factors: energy consumption, use of natural resources, and waste production. An advertising company will then be able to compare the ecological impact of different campaigns, such as distributing posters printed on recyclable paper versus lighting up a sign in Times Square.

For more information, visit www.ecopublicite.com.

Society

Blogs

POLLY-VOUS FRANÇAIS?

Francophiles from around the world have discovered a new source for insight into expatriate life in France with “Polly-vous français,” at: pollyvousfrancais.blogspot.com.

“Polly,” a Boston-born Baby Boomer living on the Left Bank in Paris, blogs in a humorous style on diverse matters that readers may find filled with unexpectedly practical information about French and American lifestyles.

Polly discusses a variety of subjects, from local news in her neighborhood and architectural curiosities, to trends in real estate, language, and culture. “Le Dialector” (referer.wunderman-i.com/dialector), is one droll yet perhaps practical resource, for example, that explains English expressions in French as well as neologisms in both French and English to facilitate the comprehension and evolution of expressions and slang, much like Urban Dictionary.com.

In one of her entries, Polly introduces tourists to the existence of a handy service: “Blessed relief is here! Now, no need to cross your legs in agony any more — there is a Web site dedicated to listing all the public restrooms in France, Switzerland and Belgium.” “Geopipi,” as the service is called, can be accessed online at www.geopipi.com and provides details on the location and type of restroom facilities available in different cities. For additional convenience, Geopipi aims to launch services via cell phone and GPS by the end of the year to help tourists on the move locate restrooms in their vicinity.

News From France does not endorse the content, views and opinions of authors expressed in the aforementioned Web sites.

Driver’s License on the Road to Reform

On December 20, 2007, Dominique Busserene, Secretary of State for Transportation, along with Jacques Péllissard, president of the Association of Mayors of France, and Cécile Petit, Interministerial Delegate of Road Safety, signed an agreement to provide financial support to young people obtaining a driver’s license in France. Under the charter, municipalities will distribute bourses (stipends) to candidates 18 to 25 years old to help defray the cost of driving school and license exam. In exchange for this assistance, young people must perform a certain amount of community service hours. Often viewed as a vital step toward gaining autonomy, the possession of a driver’s license could now become a reality for many young people with insufficient personal or family funds. In the future, Busserene hopes to enact additional legislation to simplify and accelerate the driver’s license process, while keeping in mind environmental concerns.
Paris Celebrates 300th Anniversary of Birth of Ben Franklin

The 300th anniversary of the birth of one of America's best-loved founding fathers, Benjamin Franklin, has brought on a wave of celebrations, both in the US and abroad. The Benjamin Franklin Tercentenary, a private non-profit alliance, represents a consortium created in 2000 by the Franklin Institute and several other organizations to commemorate this occasion.

Among its various projects, the Tercentenary organized an exhibition, titled "Benjamin Franklin: In Search of a Better World," that traveled the throughout U.S. in 2007 and has now crossed the Atlantic. The exhibit, "Homme de Science, Homme du Monde," is currently showing at the Musée des Arts et Métiers in Paris, where it will remain until March 30. It features artwork, documents, artifacts, and interactive displays that evoke Franklin's roles of printer, civic leader, scientist, politician, and diplomat.

A second exhibition developed with the Tercentenary will be on display at the Musée Carnavalet in Paris until March 9. "Benjamin Franklin, an American in Paris," centers on the years 1776 to 1785, which Franklin spent in the City of Light, and explores his influence, both political and scientific, as well as his exceptional popularity in France.

Benjamin Franklin was sent to France as a diplomat in 1776 to ensure the support of the country in the American Revolutionary War, and from his arrival he was a figure of interest, eventually earning recognition as a revered defender of liberty and democracy. For more information, please visit: www.arts-et-metiers.net, carnavalet.paris.fr, and www.benfranklin300.org.

French Cinema Honored at Golden Globes and Oscars

The announcement of the Golden Globe winners on January 13 and the Academy Award nominations on January 22 cast the limelight on France in the arts in 2007. At the Golden Globes, French-themed films took home four awards and were nominated for a total of six. The winners were among the best received films of the year: "La Vie en Rose" ("La Môme"), "The Diving Bell and the Butterfly" ("Le scaphandre et le papillon"), and "Ratatouille."

"La Vie en Rose" chronicles the troubled life of one of France's best-loved icons, Edith Piaf. For her portrayal of the chanteuse, French actress Marion Cotillard won the Golden Globe for Best Actress in a Musical/Comedy. Cotillard also received an Oscar nomination for Best Actress in a Leading Role.

"The Diving Bell and the Butterfly," the biographical story of a French Elle magazine editor at the center of the Paris fashion industry who suffers a paralyzing stroke, took home two awards at the Golden Globes: Best Foreign Language Film and Best Director for Julian Schnabel, and was nominated for Best Original Screenplay. At the Oscars, the film is up for three awards, including Best Director.

"Ratatouille" is an American-made film that tells the lighthearted tale of a young Parisian rat who yearns to be a part of the French culinary world. It was awarded the Golden Globe for Best Animated Film and is nominated in the same category, and two others, at the Oscars. These three films also received numerous nominations from other awards ceremonies, along with several other films with ties to France, including "Persepolis," "Lady Chatterley," and "2 Days in Paris."

Madame Bovary's Online Debut

In honor of the novel's 150th anniversary, the original manuscripts of Gustave Flaubert's "Madame Bovary" are now available online at "l'Atelier Bovary." ("The Bovary Workshop"). Dubbed by Flaubert as la bouille ("the mush"), the collective manuscripts total 4,546 pages of brouillons (drafts) and annotated versions of the famous text. At the click of a mouse, online visitors can flip through the entire collection with the help of an index, search engine, and site map.

In 1856, "Madame Bovary" caused quite the scandal when it first appeared in serial form in La Revue de Paris (The Paris Review). The novel chronicles the adulterous affairs of Emma Bovary, a doctor's wife, and is largely critical of middle-class values. Caught in the midst of social upheaval, Flaubert was put on trial for graphic nature of his work. Following the author's acquittal in 1857, the novel was published in book form and quickly became a best seller. Today it remains a highly accredited work of French literature.

In 1914, Flaubert's niece Caroline donated the "Bovary" manuscripts to the Bibliothèque de Rouen (Rouen Library), in northwest France. With as many as forty drafts for a single page, a team of professional copyists and decoders set to work on the project in 2002 at the University of Rouen's Centre Haubert. The free online publication of the manuscripts is the result of this laborious process. For more information, please visit: www.coulous.com/bovary.

Cultural Highlights

Several French Museums Offer Free Admission

France recently announced plans to offer free admission at 18 national museums, including the Louvre, the Centre Pompidou, and Quai Branly from early this year until June 30. Under the initiative, certain museums will grant free entry to all patrons, while others will offer free admission once a week to those under 26. The goal of this experiment is to boost attendance levels from both foreign visitors and French citizens, especially the younger generation.

"French museums are ready for more visitors," affirmed Christine André, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Culture and Communication, "and we hope to draw in a new public, especially young people." Depending on the results, the trial period may be extended. The program aims to achieve similar success as in Britain, where, according to the New York Times, a free admission initiative launched in 2001 sparked a 50 percent increase in museum attendance since its inception.

Chic Campaign for the Annual Winter Sales

Paris’s winter sales period kicked off January 9 with the second annual "Operation Solides by Paris," a week-and-a-half long campaign to attract more people to one of the foremost capitals of shopping. The Chamber of Commerce and Industry, along with the Office of Tourism in Paris, mapped out shopping tours across the city districts tailored to shoppers’ fancies. The five shopping routes are classified under the themes of "chic," "original," "romantic," "creative," and "trendy." For example, if a couple would like to enjoy an afternoon of shopping "à deux," they might find themselves strolling down the "romantic" route. Shoppers with a penchant for style might prefer the "chic" alternative that navigates throughout designer boutiques on Rue du Faubourg. The half-million-euro promotional campaign included shopping stations staffed with trilingual hostesses and shopping coaches to assist eager buyers and tourists along the maze of sales. Hotels pitched in by collaborating with 2,000 retailers and designers to offer welcome packs filled with discounts for this normally "low" season.

Canada's Brooke Anderson announces Marion Cotillard as Best Actress at the 65th Golden Globe Awards press conference.

French Cinema Honored at Golden Globes and Oscars

France Magazine's winter 2007-2008 issue presents the first-ever guide to French design beyond the Paris beltway, showcasing the most exciting new design in hotels, restaurants and cultural venues from Brittany to the Alps, from Lille to Saint-Tropez. To order a copy, please visit: francemagazine.org.
Exploring "Artistic Repetition" in Phoenix

The Phoenix Art Museum in Arizona is hosting "Masterpiece Replayed: Monet, Matisse and More" from January 20 to May 4, 2008. Featuring the art of 11 renowned artists, the exhibition explores how and why early modernist French painters used repetition in their paintings — often depicting the same scene over and over — for deliberate and defined purposes.

The exhibition examines approximately 60 of the most famous paintings, watercolors, sculptures and etchings by artists such as David, Delacroix, Gérôme, Corot, Millet, Monet, Degas, Cézanne, Matisse, and others. Thirteen case-studies in the exhibit provide an opportunity to compare different versions of the masterpieces and to initiate conversation about originality and mastery.

The works on display are on loan by 31 of the foremost collections from around the world, including, among others, the Louvre in Paris, the National Gallery in London, and the Hermitage Museum in St. Petersburg, Russia. The exhibition presents "a rare opportunity to discover a new story about how artists like Monet, Matisse, Degas, and Cézanne worked," according to Dr. Thomas J. Loughman, curator of European Art for the Phoenix Art Museum.

The museum is one of two museums worldwide to host this exhibition organized in association with the Walters Art Museum in Baltimore. For more information, please visit: www.phxart.org.

French Artist Builds Momentum in the States

French artist Kader Attia is currently turning heads at Boston’s Institute of Contemporary Art (ICA) with his mixed media installation, "Momentum 9." The exhibition is the ninth showcase of the museum’s ongoing "Momentum" series in which up-and-coming artists from around the globe create innovative, contemporary works for the ICA. Known for fashioning works out of anything from birdseed and live pigeons to mirrored rooms and drill bits, Attia is making his solo debut in the U.S. with this newest exhibit.

Born in 1970 to Algerian parents, Attia grew up in Dugny, a suburb of Paris. "Momentum 9," which resembles an overcrowded dormitory, evokes the artist’s childhood memories of sharing a room with five other children and sleeping on makeshift wooden beds. To bring his vision to life, Attia lived in Boston for six weeks and enlisted the help of students from the Massachusetts College of Art and Design as well as members of the ICA Teen Arts Council. The students left an imprint on one of his newest creations by tracing the outlines of their bodies in foam, and digging them out by hand.

Attia found inspiration not only in personal memories, but also in the teachings of Chinese philosopher Lao Tzeo. Tzeo’s thought-provoking proverb, "Human beings create things, but emptiness gives them meaning," served as inspiration to Attia’s unique canon of building a sense of community through absence. "Momentum 9" opened on November 14, 2007, and will remain on display at the ICA until March 2, 2008. For more information, please visit: www.icaboston.org.