The economic, social and political situation of France today

(Contemporary French Society)

The purpose of the course is to go beyond ideas about France which are often based on stereotypes. In order to achieve this objective, we shall explore the tensions which have existed for decades in French society and their recent evolution. We shall bear in mind the difficult context which the country must face: a global financial and economic crisis along with serious new security threats.

How is France coming to terms with the major problems facing its society?

WEEK #) and TOPICS

Part one: The economy and its impact

France has been losing ground economically, with direct consequences on employment and possibly the general well being of its citizens.

1) What is the economic situation of France after the 2008 economic and financial crisis? How has it actually evolved in the past two decades? Is this the result of an international crisis or of misguided choices by France's decision makers?

2) How are the workforce and the population at large reacting? Is the country moving away from a belief in "dirigisme" and closer to accepting globalization?

Part two: Social problems

The growth of social inequality and the feeling of injustice: What has become of "l'ascenseur social"?

3) Tensions on "l'Etat providence" and "le modèle français": pensions, unemployment benefits, education ("l'école" as a basis for cultural identity), training, health care. At what cost?

4) A lasting tendency to locate problems in specific areas: suburbs and "les quartiers", areas of poverty: reading reality with outdated instruments.

5) The immigrant population and their French children: the lasting impact of social exclusion and discrimination. A look at the many ways in which French society has been transformed by the complex history of immigration.

6) and 7) Relations between generations, between sexes, between social groups, between religions: the newly emerged concepts of "vivre ensemble" versus "identité".
The necessary revision of "les grands symboles : le travail, la famille, la laïcité".

**Part three : Political challenges**

**Domestic politics**

The system instituted by the 5th Republic guarantees government stability but now seems to ruin its legitimacy. The process of selection of the french political elite is under fire.

8) and 9) French citizens have been increasingly losing faith in the people that govern them. That process endangers the belief in democracy. A look at the evolution of citizen participation in the political process and at attempts to rekindle hope.

10) Traditional political parties are failing to counteract the dynamics of the far right. How far can this go? A close look at the 2017 presidential campaign.

**European and foreign policy**


12) What is the place of France today in international relations? How does France deal with threats on its own soil?

13) One class will be devoted to drawing conclusions from the material and the discussions.

**Readings**:

Reading material will be handed out in class among which:

- Jean Baubérot (2009) Laïcité and the Challenge of ‘Republicanism’, Modern & Contemporary France, 17:2, 189-198,
- Réjane Sénac-Slawinski, (2008) Justifying Parity in France after the Passage of the so-called Parity Laws and the Electoral Application of them: The ‘Ideological Tinkering’ of Political Party Officials (UMP and PS) and Women’s NGOs, French Politics, 2008, 6, (234–256)


These readings will be supplemented with data and articles from French agencies such as the national institute for economic studies (INSEE), the national institute for demographic studies (INED), and reports from the Economic, Social and Environmental Council (CESE) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD).