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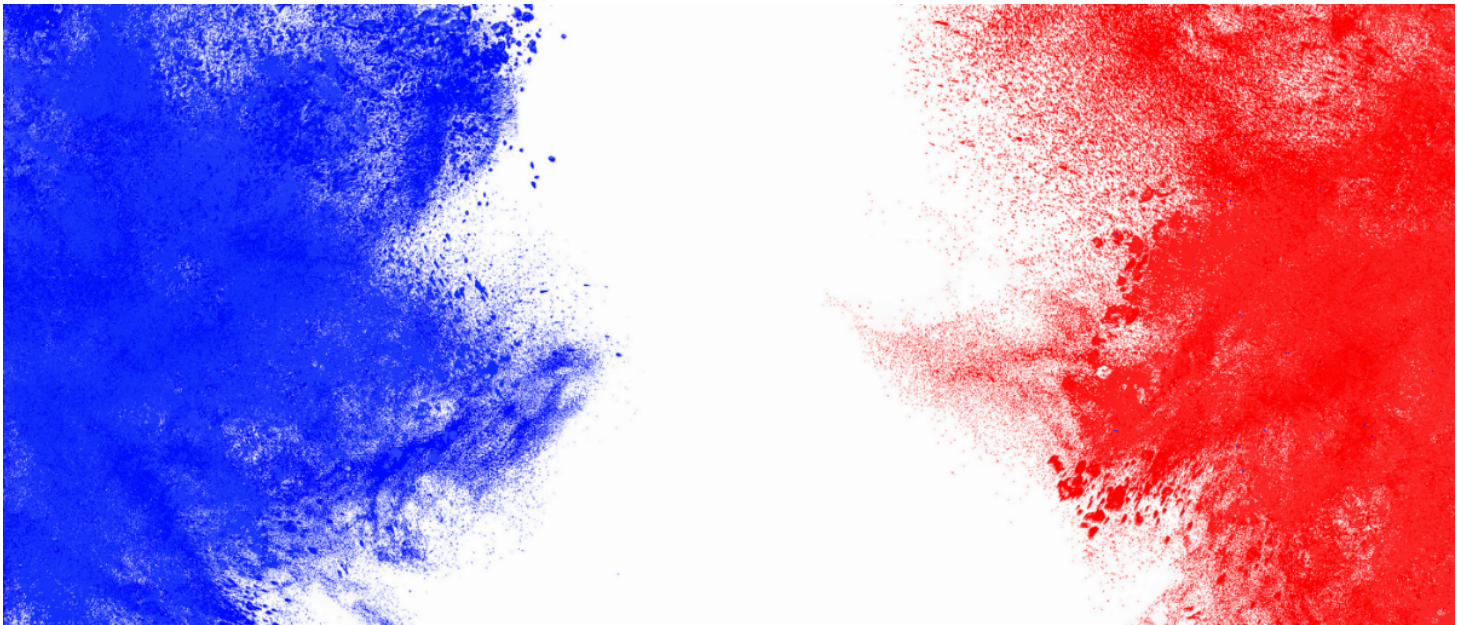
What environmental policy should the new French government pursue?

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On September 5, Michel Barnier was appointed Prime Minister by the President of the French Republic. This appointment comes at a time of political uncertainty in France following the legislative elections at the beginning of the summer, and during a European sequence marked by the renewal of the Brussels institutions following the June 2024 elections and the definition of strategic orientations for the EU. Considering the current economic, social and democratic imperatives the country is facing, what should be the priorities of the new French government in terms of environmental policies and ecological transition?

The new French government, formed as a result of a legislative election, albeit unexpected and therefore with little preparation or debate, will seek to build its own vision of the policies to be pursued. In addition to the competitiveness of the economy, which will be largely determined by the policies negotiated in Brussels, the political debate is very much focused on social issues, particularly social justice. However, environmental issues have not disappeared. In

fact, Prime Minister Barnier has referred to both the national debt and the ecological debt as crucial to the future of our society, and these issues cannot be put off until later. The major challenges of the ecological transition are therefore inevitably on the agenda of this government's political choices: first and foremost the question of adapting to climate change, which no territory or economic sector can any longer consider to be of secondary importance. In addition, these choices about the ecological transition and its financing will have a strong social justice component. And the way in which policy directions on these issues are negotiated and implemented will also be essential in demonstrating that our democracy is still functioning, despite growing mistrust in institutions and risks of instability.

In all sectors, the new government will face a number of determining factors that it must identify in order to assess its scope for action. As far as the environment is concerned, these factors are very present and well established: European obligations, in particular climate ('Fit for 55') and biodiversity ('Nature Restoration' legislation) objectives, accountability for businesses, and international obligations, in preparation for the 29th COP on Climate and its associated issues of financing Global South countries. Also to be taken into account are the objectives that France has set itself by law, for example in the field of the circular economy, where the indicators are hardly positive.

Against this backdrop of commitments made by France, the new government nonetheless has margins for action that it must use positively.

- With regard to the necessarily interministerial governance of the ecological transition, the General Secretariat for Ecological Planning (SGPE), which is a positive innovation whose action has been widely appreciated, should be strengthened. This presupposes that it will be able to carry out the major planning exercises¹ that have yet to be finalized, and that it will be involved in the budgetary decisions that should result.
- On budgetary issues, which are a key—but not the only—element in the implementation of the transition, it is important to favour concrete and serious action over communication and intermittence. The fate of the Green Fund, which supports transition investments by local authorities, is a decisive and illustrative issue. The previous government had set its amount at €2.5 billion for 2024. A substantial reduction took place in January 2024. For the 2025 budget, the outgoing Prime Minister limited the amount to €1 billion in his 'ceiling letter' ('lettre-plafond') signed in late August. However, on 12 August, in a letter to parliamentary groups chairmen on an 'Action Pact for the French' ("Pacte d'action pour les Français"), the same Prime Minister, this time as chairman of the Ensemble parliamentary group, stated his wish to 'secure the Green Fund action towards local authorities'. Is it possible to pursue a policy of support for local initiatives that is so essential to the transition without the necessary continuity and coherence? How can local authorities feel when faced with such a fickle and unpredictable State? The State cannot, in its commitments to local authorities, send out such contradictory signals that run counter to the philosophy of planning. The seriousness advocated by the new Prime Minister should therefore be reflected in the renewal of the Green Fund at its original level and of the credits allocated to the French Agency for Ecological Transition (Ademe) and the French Biodiversity Office (OFB). In times of budgetary restrictions, it is customary for the State to focus most of its efforts on interventions for the benefit of local authorities and external players, while at the same time sparing its own operating resources, which appear to be under greater pressure. This means making heavy sacrifices to local players and civil society. In the case of the ecological transition, this approach should be reconsidered to guarantee the commitment of all players to the transition.
- With regard to the implementation and follow-up of the European Green Deal, measures have been defined whose consequences primarily concern businesses in terms of strategic redeployment, investment and accountability. In Brussels, the authorities need to define an industrial policy that will enable businesses to make a

full commitment to the transition ([IDDRI, 2024](#)). France's support is also essential in implementing the recommendations of the Strategic Dialogue on Agriculture, which represents a unique opportunity to move towards an agriculture that meets the imperatives of sustainability and strategic autonomy.

- As far as participatory democracy is concerned, recent years have seen a number of steps backwards in terms of the right to participation in environmental matters. Conflicts on the ground have multiplied, reflecting the shortcomings of consultation processes, particularly on water management issues. The simplification of procedures called for by economic players must respect the principles of participation laid down in the [Barrier Act of 1995](#).
- In addition, France's international action must regain momentum. The success of COP21 leading to the Paris Climate Agreement was made possible by intense diplomatic preparatory action. We need to guarantee, in close cooperation with the European Union, a similar dynamic in the context of the negotiation of the future plastics treaty ([IDDRI, 2024](#)) or the preparation of the United Nations Conference on the Ocean to be held in Nice in 2025 ([IDDRI, 2024](#)). More generally, France, with its relevant ministries, research capabilities and think tanks, must work to reformulate the foundations of a renewed multilateralism, accepted by all countries and capable of meeting the major global challenges of the 21st century.

¹ These include the National Low-Carbon Strategy (SNBC), the Multiannual Energy Programme (PPE) and the National Plan for Adaptation to Climate Change (PNACC).

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