

France briefing: June 2022

I. French Political Developments

'Trial of the Century' into 2015 Bataclan attacks concludes

- The trial of the November 2015 Bataclan attacks in Paris, dubbed the 'Trial of the Century' by French media, concluded in June. [All of the 20 defendants were declared guilty](#), with sentences ranging from 2 years (for the charge of supplying false documents) to life. [None of the defendants appealed the decision.](#)
- Salah Abdeslam, the only surviving attacker, will serve a life sentence - meaning a minimum 30 years sentence before a potential, though highly unlikely, release on licence.

France repatriates minors from Syrian camps

- [France repatriated 35 minors and 16 mothers](#) who were detained in prison camps in Syria, in the first grouped repatriation of French families since the fall of the Islamic State in 2019.

It follows a series of international condemnations by international NGOs and institutions - including the [UN Committee on the Rights for the Child](#) which asked the French State "*to take positive and urgent measures, acting in good faith, to effect the repatriation of the child victims.*"

- The UK has also been [criticised sharply](#) for its approach to repatriating British nationals from the camps, including for operating a *de facto* policy of separating children from mothers, and its use of citizenship stripping powers on Britons to wash its hands of the problem.

II. Counter-Terrorism

New objective for National Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Coordinator

- The Prime Minister presented a decree which [adds a new mission to the National Intelligence and Counter-Terrorism Coordinator](#): *"Interministerial coordination of the human resources policies of the intelligence services, in conjunction with the ministries concerned and under the authority of the*

Prime Minister.”

This decision will allow the Coordinator to fully exercise its function of steering the intelligence services’ policies, including in the field of human resources. He will likely oversee the recruitment process and the staff distribution.

- The current Coordinator is Laurent Nunez, an ex-prefect who also served as a Secretary of State in the Ministry of the Interior from 2018 to 2020, when the [Systematic Obstruction policy](#) was secretly being implemented. He is in charge of the intelligence services’ cooperation - including in the field of counter-terrorism.

III. Islamophobia

Islamophobic statements made by key members of government

- In a telling indication of how the new French government will approach the question of ‘Islamism’ over the course of Emmanuel Macron’s second term, some ministers have made forceful statements on the matter.
- These include [Elisabeth Borne, French Prime Minister](#), stating that

"Islamism is a deadly poison. We will continue to hunt it down and fight it with all our might"

and [Pap Ndiaye, Minister of Education](#) claiming that

*"There is no state racism, but there can be racism in the state (...)
The problem are the Islamists who are carrying out a political project to destroy the Republic, the terrorists, not a mother who puts a scarf on her head to accompany a class, which she has every right to wear. We must not fight the wrong battle. We can show tolerance without being naive."*

Supreme Court backs local ‘Burkini’ ban

- [The Council of State, the French Supreme Court, confirmed the suspension](#) of Grenoble municipality’s internal regulation authorising the wearing of the "burkini" in swimming pools. Therefore the Burkini is, for now, banned.
- This suspension has been made possible by a provision of the “Anti-Separatism” Law adopted last year which allows the state to object to local decisions which oppose laïcité - French secularism.
- The “burkini controversy” has been raging in France almost every summer since 2016.