

# Slowing growth: due to the supply side?

By [Jérôme Creel](#) and [Xavier Ragot](#)

The weakness of the recovery in 2014 and 2015 raises the need for a structural re-examination of the state of France's productive fabric. Indeed, an analysis of investment dynamics, the trade balance, productivity gains and business margins, and to a lesser extent companies' access to credit, indicates the existence of some disturbing trends since the early noughties. In addition, the persistence of the crisis inevitably poses the question of the unravelling of France's productive fabric since 2007 due to a combination of low growth, weak investment and numerous bankruptcies.

The contributions gathered in [Revue de l'OFCE no.142](#) have a double ambition: first, to put France's businesses and economic sectors at the heart of reflection about the ins and outs of the current slowdown in growth, and second, to question the basis for theoretical analyses of future growth in light of the situation of France and Europe. Based on the various contributions, nine conclusions emerge:

1) Growth potential, a concept that aims to measure an economy's medium-term productive capacity, has fallen in France since the crisis. While the level of potential growth is high over the long term, on the order of 1.8%, it has fallen since the crisis by about 0.4 point, according to the new measurement provided by Eric Heyer and Xavier Timbeau.

2) The main point is to figure out whether this slowdown is temporary or permanent. This is important for growth forecasts but also with respect to France's European commitments, which depend on its growth potential. One important conclusion is that a very large portion of the current slowdown is

transitory and linked to France's economic policy. As Bruno Ducoudré and Mathieu Plane demonstrate, the low level of investment and employment can be explained by the macroeconomic environment and in particular by the current sluggish economy. Business behaviour does not seem to have changed during the crisis. The analysis by Ducoudré and Plane also shows that the determinants of investment differ in the short term and the long term. A 1% increase in economic activity increases investment by 1.4% after one quarter, whereas a 1% increase in the margin rate has very little impact in that same period. However, over the long term (10 years), a 1% increase in activity boosts investment by about 1%, while a 1% increase in the margin rate boosts investment by 2%. So promoting investment means supporting economic activity in the short term, while boosting margins will have an impact over the longer term.

3) France's productive fabric will take time to recover from the effects of the crisis because of three major obstacles: the weakness of investment, of course, but also the decline in the quality of investment and finally the disruption of production following on from the poor allocation of capital during the crisis, including its territorial dimension. Sarah Guillou and Lionel Nesta show that the low level of investment makes it impossible to go upmarket, which has meant less technical progress since the crisis. Jean-Luc Gaffard and Lionel Nesta then show that regional convergence has slowed since the crisis, and that economic activity has tended to decline in the most productive areas.

4) The concept of growth potential as a tool for macroeconomic management has emerged from the crisis in a profoundly weakened state. Whatever the methods used, ongoing revisions of growth potential make the idea of a system of rules-based European guidance dangerous, according to Henri Sterdyniak. There is a need to rediscover European economic policy that is discretionary in character. In addition, fiscal policy that is

more contingent on macroeconomic and financial conditions needs to be better coordinated with the climate issue, as Jérôme Creel and Eloi Laurent argue.

5) The notion of secular stagnation, that is to say, a lasting weakening of growth, has led to intense debate. Two visions of secular stagnation are discussed. The first vision, associated with Robert Gordon, insists that technological progress has been exhausted. The second flows from the analysis of Larry Summers and stresses the possibility of a permanent demand deficit. Jérôme Creel and Eloi Laurent show the limitations of the analysis of Robert Gordon for France; in particular, French demographics are more an advantage for French growth than a hindrance. Gilles Le Garrec and Vincent Touzé show the possibility of a long-term demand deficit that would hinder capital accumulation, due to the central bank's inability to make further interest rate reductions. In this kind of environment, support for demand is necessary to get out of an unfavourable equilibrium between low inflation and high unemployment, which leads to a negative perception of growth potential. Changing expectations may require large-scale policies to stimulate economic activity, along with an acceptance of high inflation over the long term.

6) The analyses presented here therefore recognize the profound difficulties with France's productive fabric and recommend better coordination of public policy. Support for demand is needed rapidly in order to restore investment, followed by an ongoing progressive policy to boost the margins of companies exposed to international competition – so, according to Jean-Luc Gaffard and Francesco Saraceno, not a competitive shock, but rather support for business that takes into account the time profile of productive investment.

7) In the longer term, part of what can be characterized as the French supply-side problem is the result of poor European adjustments, including the discrepancy in wages between Europe's major economies. The divergence between France and

Germany since the mid-1990s has been impressive. Mathilde Le Moigne and Xavier Ragot show that German wage restraint is a singularity among European countries. They offer a quantification of the impact of this wage moderation on France's foreign trade and economic activity, and conclude that German wage restraint has contributed to an increase of more than 2 points in France's unemployment rate. A supply policy could also go by the name of a policy for European re-convergence.

8) The deep-going modernization of the productive fabric will depend on spaces for cooperation, collective learning and collaboration so as to nourish the creativity made possible by new technologies. These spaces need to recognize the importance of difficult-to-value intangible assets. In economies with an ageing workforce, advances in robotics and artificial intelligence should lead to enhancing potential productivity, according to Sandrine Levasseur. Cooperation also needs to be strengthened in two areas: the company and the territory. Within companies, partnership governance should help limit short-termist financial tendencies. With respect to territory, the definition of regional innovation systems should be the focus of a modern industrial policy, according to Michel Aglietta and Xavier Ragot.

9) Guillaume Allègre concludes that it is not so much the level of production that is disturbing as the inequitable distribution of the fruits of growth, however small these may be. The emerging consensus on the negative impact of inequality on economic growth should not obscure the real debate, which does not concern just the income gap, but also what that income makes it possible to consume, i.e. equal access to goods and services of equal quality. The key question is thus the content of production, more than simply growth.

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# Wage moderation in Germany – at the origin of France's economic difficulties

*By Xavier Ragot, President of the OFCE, CNRS-PSE, together with Mathilde Le Moigne, ENS*

If the future of the euro zone does indeed depend on political cooperation between France and Germany, then economic divergences between the two countries should be a cause for concern. These divergences need to be analysed, with particular attention to three specific areas: the unemployment rate, the trade balance and the public debt. Germany's unemployment rate is falling steadily; in June it was under the 5% mark, which represents almost full employment, whereas the French rate is over 10%. Germany's low unemployment rate does not however reflect strong consumption by German households, but rather the country's export capacity. While France continues to run a negative trade balance (importing more than it exports), Germany is now the world's leading exporter, ahead of China, with a trade surplus that will run close to 8% in 2015. As for the public deficit, it will be around 3.8% in France in 2015, while Germany is now generating a surplus. This has impressive consequences for the way the public debt is changing in the two countries. In 2010 they were similar, at around 80% of GDP, but in 2014 Germany's public debt fell below 75%, and is continuing to decline, while France's debt has continued to grow, and has now hit 97%. This kind of gap is unprecedented in recent times, and is fraught with mounting tension over the conduct of monetary policy.

This triple divergence is inevitably leading to differences in the political response, with respect to the population's ability to take in migrants and to the understanding of countries facing economic difficulties, such as Greece, but also with respect to the ability to cope with future economic crises. Economic divergence will become political divergence. The point is not to idealize the German situation, which is characterized by a large number of workers who have failed to benefit from the fruits of growth, as is shown in a recent study by France Stratégie, as well as by a rapid decline in population. This should not stop us from taking a hard look at the economic gap arising between the two countries.

### ***What are the reasons for Germany's commercial success?***

Many factors have been advanced to explain the divergence between the two neighbours: for some, it's a matter of the German strategy – outsourcing value chains, aggressive wage moderation, fostering competition between companies – and for others, French weaknesses: poor geographical and / or sectoral specialization, insufficient public support for exporters, and a lack of competition in certain sectors. Our [recent study](#) emphasizes the delayed impact of German wage moderation and suggests that this could explain almost half of the Franco-German divergence. To understand the mechanisms involved, it is necessary to distinguish between the sectors exposed to international competition and the sectors that are sheltered. The exposed sectors include industry, but also agriculture, including animal husbandry, which is currently in the news, and some services that can be traded. The sheltered sector includes transportation, real estate, retailing and a large part of personal services.

While unit labour costs in France have risen regularly and at similar levels in the two above-mentioned sectors, they have remained extraordinarily stable in Germany for nearly ten years. This wage moderation is the result of both poor management of German reunification, which tipped the balance

of power during wage negotiations in favour of employers, and, to a much less extent, the introduction of the Hartz reforms in 2003-2005, which aimed to create low-paid work in the less competitive sectors (particularly the sheltered sector). The cost of German reunification is estimated at 900 billion euros, in terms of transfers from former West Germany, or slightly less than three times the Greek debt. Faced with this kind of challenge, the wage moderation initiated in 1993 represented a strategy for re-convergence between the two parts of Germany. In 2012, German nominal wages were 20% lower than French wages in the exposed (tradable) sector and 30% lower in the sheltered sector, compared to the 1993 levels. A look at French and German margin levels shows that in the exposed sector, French exporters have made significant efforts by reducing their margins in order to maintain their price competitiveness. In the sheltered sector, French margins are on average 6% higher than German margins. The bulk of France's loss of price competitiveness is therefore a loss of cost competitiveness.

How much have these differences contributed to unemployment and the trade balance in the two countries? Our quantitative analysis shows that if German wage restraint had not taken place between 1993 and 2012, today's 8% gap in the trade balances would instead be 4.7% (2.2% of this being due solely to German wage moderation in the sheltered sector). Thus, Germany's wage moderation policy explains almost 40% of the difference in trade performance between the two countries. We also found that this wage moderation accounts for more than 2 points of France's unemployment.

### ***The non-price competitiveness gap***

This leaves nearly 60% of the difference in the trade balances still needing to be explained. Our study suggests that this difference is due to the quality of the goods produced, so-called non-price competitiveness. Between 1993 and 2012, the German quality-price ratio increased by around 19% compared

with that of France, which has therefore more than offset the rise in German export prices relative to French prices. There is clearly a “quality” effect in this non-price competitiveness: Germany produces “high end”, more innovative goods than France does in the same sectors. It is also possible to see an impact due to the outsourcing of some German production (nearly 52% of production volume in 2012) to countries where costs are lower: Germany today is a centre for design and assembly, which saves money on its intermediary costs, enabling it to invest more in brand strategies and efforts to move upscale.

This effect is nevertheless probably endogenous, that is to say, it flows in part from Germany’s advantage in cost competitiveness. Low labour costs have enabled German exporters to maintain their margins in the face of external competition. The funds generated have led to investments which French companies have probably had to forego in order to maintain their price-competitiveness, thus losing the opportunity to catch up with German products in terms of non-price competitiveness over the longer term.

### ***A positive way out and up***

The root cause of the gap in economic performance between Germany and France lies in the nominal divergence observed between the two countries since the early 1990s. One way to reduce these differences would be to promote convergence in wages in Europe and in its labour markets more generally. Germany would need to allow wage inflation that was higher than in the periphery countries, thereby dealing with the increase in social inequalities in Germany, while France must not fall into the trap of competitive deflation, which would destroy its domestic demand, while keeping wage movements under control. In this respect, the report of the five Presidents presented by the European Commission on 22 June 2015 proposes the establishment of national competitiveness authorities, which hopefully would allow greater cooperation



on social welfare and employment.

The difference in wages between France and Germany has profound implications in terms of economic thought. The increased trade integration that followed the introduction of the euro led not to a convergence but to a divergence in labour markets. It is then up to each State to once again bring about convergence of the economies while supporting economic activity. This State intervention in the economy is more complex than the simple Keynesian framework for the management of aggregate demand, and now involves the convergence of labour markets. Heretofore, Europe's response has been systematic cuts in labour costs, while what is really needed is to increase wages in surplus countries, such as Germany, for example by using the minimum wage as a tool. All this, it is true, is economics. The politics begins when we realize that only long-term cooperation can bring about a convergence in national interests.

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## **The erosion of France's productive base: causes and remedies**

[Xavier Ragot](#), President of the OFCE and the CNRS

The deindustrialization of France, and more generally the difficulties facing sectors exposed to international competition, reflects trends that have been at work in France and in Europe for more than a decade. Indeed, while the strictly financial moment when the crisis struck in 2007 was

the result of the bursting of the American real estate bubble, the scale of its impact on Europe's economy cannot be understood without looking at vulnerabilities that have previously been neglected.

In "Érosion du tissu productif en France: Causes et remèdes", [OFCE working document no. 2015-04](#), Michel Aglietta and I offer a summary of both the microeconomic and macroeconomic factors behind this productive drift. Such a synthesis is essential. Before proposing any policy changes for France, it is necessary to make a coherent diagnosis of major trends in international trade as well as of the real situation of France's productive fabric.

### **European divergences**

The starting point is the surprising divergence seen in Europe. The euro zone's two largest countries, Germany and France, have diverged in an unprecedented way since the mid-1990s. While property prices remained stable in Germany, in France they increased by a factor of 2.5, hitting the country with two negative consequences: a high cost of living for its employees, and a collapse in property investment by its businesses. Wages in Germany are now 20% lower than in France due to the wage moderation implemented to manage the former's reunification process. Furthermore, until the crisis, real short-term interest rates (which take into account inflation differentials) were about 1 percentage point lower in France and Spain than in Germany. This change in the price of the production factors (higher real interest rates and lower wages in Germany than in France) did not give rise to a greater substitution of capital for labour in France. There was little difference between the two countries in the investment rate, which was relatively stable in both. Other indicators, such as the number of robots, indicate on the contrary that there was less modernization of France's productive fabric. These changes in factor prices have not therefore translated into an adjustment in the productive

fabric, but have instead led to an unsustainable divergence in the current accounts.

Current account balances are crucial concepts for measuring disequilibria within Europe. A positive current account means that a country is lending to the rest of the world, while a negative current account means that it is borrowing from the rest of the world. While European rules have focused attention on the public deficit alone, the proper measure of a country's indebtedness is the current account, the sum of public and private debt. On this measure, Germany's current account is one of the most positive in the world, meaning that it is lending heavily to other countries. While over the last three years the differences between European current accounts have been narrowing, this is the result more of a contraction in activity due to austerity measures than of a modernization of the productive base in countries with negative current accounts. The European framework for analysing macroeconomic imbalances does of course have numerous indicators, including the current account. However, in practice the multiplicity of indicators gives a crucial role to the numerical public deficit targets. So while the framework for European surveillance seems very general in its assessment of economic imbalances, it is the short-term budgetary aspect alone that dominates analysis. Don't forget that Spain's public debt was less than 40% of GDP in 2007, but over 90% of GDP in 2013. Low public debts are not therefore a sufficient condition for macroeconomic stability, just as public debts that are temporarily high are not necessarily a sign of structural problems.

### ***The fragility of France's productive base***

In this sense, corporate data can be used to gain insight into trends in the French economy. French companies did of course experience a fall in margins, but this has mainly affected sectors exposed to international competition. Corporate profitability (which finances the payment of dividends and

interest and contributes to investment) fell from 6.2% in 2000 to less than 5% in 2012. Despite this decline, the investment rate held steady in all business categories during the period, in part funded by corporate savings, which declined from a rate of 16% in 2000 to 13% in 2012. The result has been a substantial rise in corporate debt, although up to now this has not led by higher debt costs due to the fall in interest rates. All these factors are inevitably fuelling concern about the health of our productive fabric: France's businesses have responded to economic difficulties, not by innovation, but by financializing their balance sheets and taking on debt.

### ***Towards partnership in governance***

To innovate, invest and upscale, France's companies must make efforts over the long term – this is the only way there will be a process of reconvergence in Europe. The point is not to maximize short-term financial returns, through for example excessive dividend payments, but rather to invest over horizons that are typically considered (too) long by companies. As a result, making improvements to France's productive fabric will require shifting corporate governance towards a model based on stronger partnerships and a more long-term vision in order to invest in employees' skills and qualifications, in intangible assets, and in new technologies. Social dialogue is not just about income distribution and tax reform but is also essential within companies in order to ensure the mobilization of our only productive wealth, men and women who are putting their all into their work.

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# Concerning the Macron law “to promote growth, activity and equal economic opportunity”

By [Henri Sterdyniak](#)

The Macron Law is certainly not the “law of the century”. It is a patchwork of about 240 provisions of varying importance. It is not some “great turn to the free market” nor does it represent a uniquely French strategy. It does nevertheless raise interesting questions about France’s economic strategy and the way the legislature works.

The latest issue of the [Note de l’OFCE \(no. 43 of 13 March 2015\)](#) examines the law’s major provisions, which oscillate between free market liberalization (let competition and the market do their work), social liberalism (certain categories of the population must be protected), economic interventionism (the state must regulate the functioning of the markets), and social democracy (the social partners must play an important role), without a clear victory for any of these. It is a compromise text that by definition cannot really satisfy anyone.

In our view, despite its title, there are few provisions in the law that will promote activity or that are beneficial to industry, to “Made in France”, to urban renewal, to the habitat, to the production of sustainable recyclable goods, or to greater employee participation in the decision-making process in their business. The law is instead in line with the myth of an economy driven by innovative start-ups, and ignores the need for industrial restructuring and an ecological transition.

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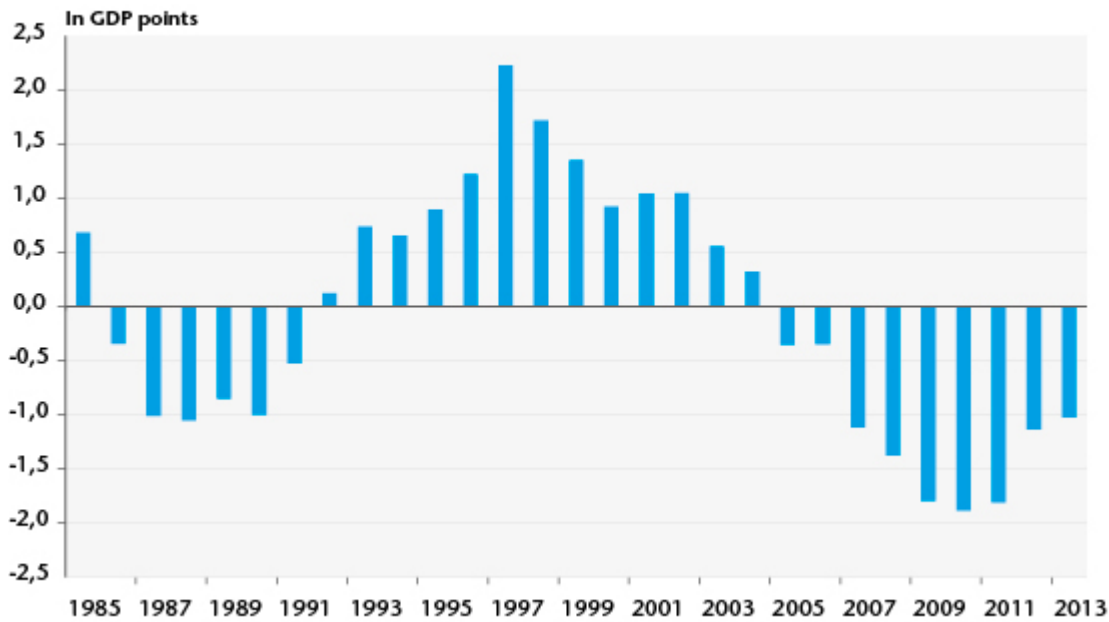
# Is France's trade deficit entirely structural?

By [Eric Heyer](#)

The issue at the heart of the debate between those arguing that a lack of supply is behind the low level of activity in France over the last four years and those arguing that the problem is a lack of demand is the nature of the country's trade deficit.

On the one hand, the French economy has a number of symptoms characteristic of an economy experiencing a shortfall in demand: strong disinflation, high unemployment, businesses declaring substantial spare capacity due mainly to a lack of demand, etc. But, on the other hand, the existence of a persistent deficit in the trade balance (Figure 1) casts doubt on the competitiveness of French firms and on their capacity to meet additional demand, which would thus express a problem with supply.

Figure 1. French trade balance since 1985



Source: INSEE.

So, after more than ten years of trade surpluses, which represented over 2 GDP points in 1997, France's trade balance turned negative in 2005. After widening gradually until 2010 when the deficit reached nearly 2 GDP points, the trend turned around. In 2013 (the latest available figure), the trade deficit still stood at 1 GDP point.

This observation is not however sufficient to dismiss all the arguments of the proponents of a demand shortage that France simply suffers from a supply problem. What is needed at a minimum is to analyze the nature of the deficit and try to separate its structural component from its cyclical component. The latter is the result of a difference in the economic cycle between France and its major trading partners. When a country's situation is more favourable than that of its partners, that country will tend to run a deficit in its trade balance linked to domestic demand and thus to more buoyant imports. A trade deficit may thus arise regardless of how competitive the country's domestic firms are.

One way to take this cyclical gap into account is to compare the gaps between an economy's actual output and its potential output (the output gap). At the national level, a positive

output gap (respectively negative) means that the economy is in a phase of expansion (respectively of contraction) of the cycle, which, other things being equal, should lead to a cyclical deterioration (or improvement) in its trade balance. In terms of the trading partners, when they are in a cyclical expansionary phase (positive output gap), this should lead to a cyclical improvement in the trade balance of the country in question.

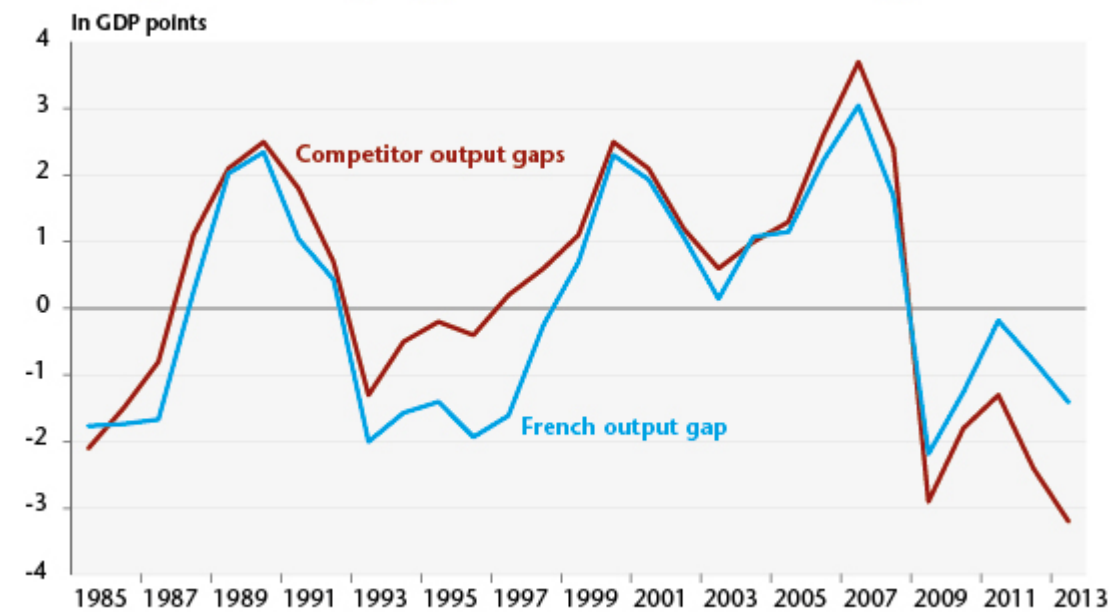
Using data from the latest issue of the OECD's *Economic Outlook* (eo96), we calculated an "aggregate" output gap for France's partners by weighting the output gap of each partner by the weight of French exports to that country in France's total exports.

This calculation, shown in Figure 2, highlights two points:

1. The first is that, according to the OECD, France's output gap has been negative since 2008, signalling the existence of room for the French economy to rebound.
2. The second is that the economic situation of our trading partners is even worse. The cyclical gap, measured by the difference between the output gaps of France and of its partners, indicates a significant difference in favour of France.



Figure 2. The output gap of France and its main trading partners



Source: OECD, eo96.

It is then possible to assess the impact of the cyclical situation of the country and that of its main partners on the trade balance.

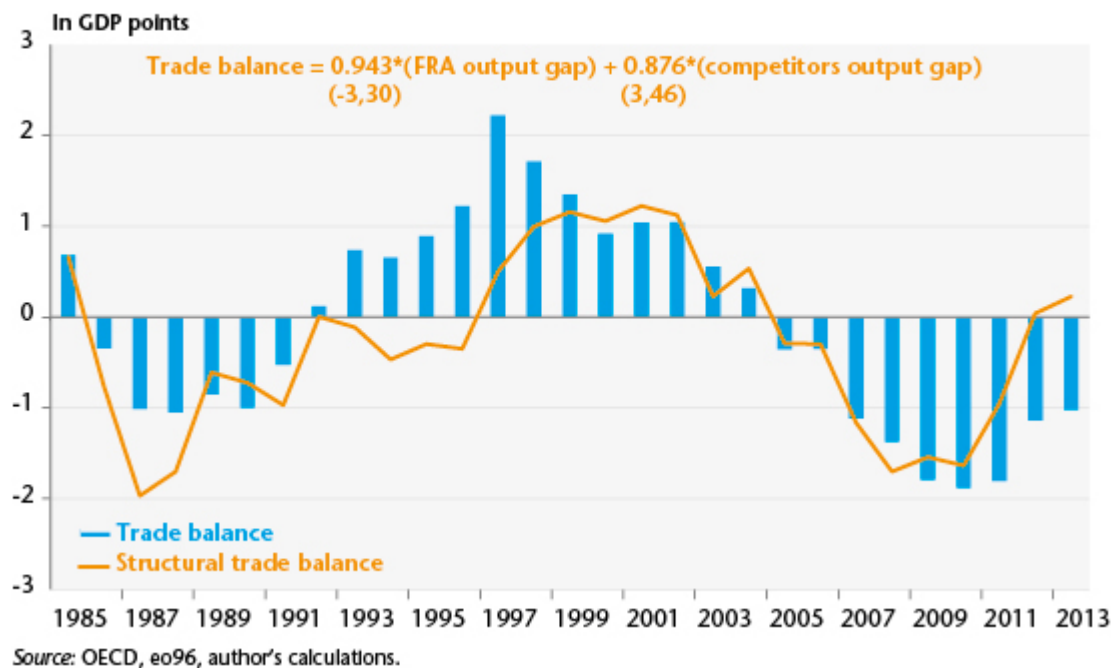
A simple estimate using Ordinary Least Squares over the period 1985-2013 shows a relationship of [cointegration](#) between these three variables (trade balance, output gap of France and output gap of its partners) for France. The signs obtained are consistent with what we would intuitively expect: when France is in an expansionary phase, its trade balance tends to worsen (coefficient of  $-0.943$ ). In contrast, when rival countries are experiencing a boom, this makes for an improvement in France's trade balance (coefficient of  $+0.876$ ).

France's structural trade balance since 1985 can then be calculated by subtracting the cyclical effect (national and competitors) from the observed trade balance.

Figure 3 shows this calculation. First, the fall in the euro in the late 1990s led to a structural improvement in France's structural balance. The sharp deterioration in the trade balance between 2001 and 2007 would then be entirely structural: it would be explained in particular by China's

entry into the WTO, by the competitive disinflation policy adopted by Germany, and by the appreciation of the euro. Since the 2008 crisis, however, an increasingly substantial portion of the French trade deficit would be cyclical. So even if French growth were sluggish, the country's economic difficulties were nonetheless less dramatic than in the case of some of its trading partners[1]. It is this relatively more favourable performance compared to its major trading partners that would have led to the rise of a trade deficit, part of which was cyclical. By 2013, the imbalances in the current account would be entirely cyclical in origin.

**Figure 3. France's structural trade balance  
based on OECD data**



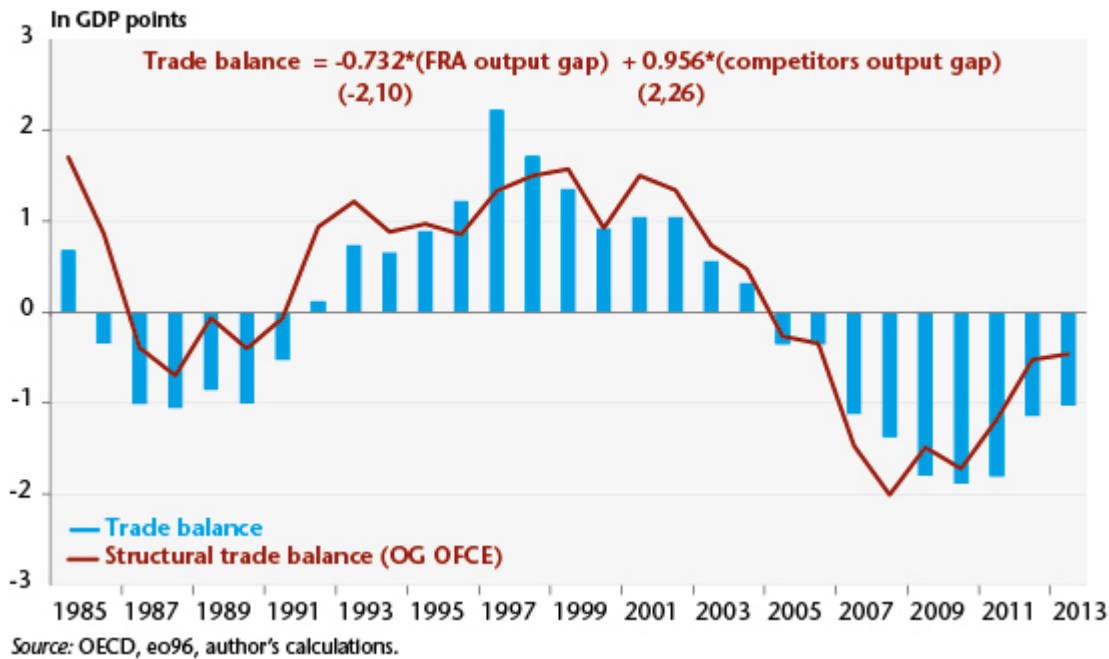
This result echoes the analysis provided by the French national accounting office on the factors driving growth over the last four years: the level of real GDP in the third quarter of 2014 was only 1.4% higher than in first quarter 2011. An analysis of the factors contributing to this performance is unambiguous: private demand (household and business) was down sharply (-1.6%), particularly household consumption, the traditional engine of economic growth. While there are more households today than four years ago, their total consumption was 0.6% below their 2011 level. However,

while the French economy's ability to deal with the global competitive framework is being questioned by the dominant discourse, foreign trade has in fact had a very positive impact in the last four years, with a boost from exports, which contributed a positive 2 GDP points to growth. In short, for four years the French economy has been driven mainly by exports, while it has been held back by private demand.

This analysis is of course based on an assessment of output gaps, whose measurement is tricky and subject to sharp revisions. In this respect, while there is an institutional consensus on the estimate that France has a negative output gap, there is also a broad range in the magnitudes of the room for a rebound, ranging in 2014 from 2.5 to 4 points, depending on the institution (IMF, OECD, European Commission, OFCE).

This diagnosis would be somewhat attenuated if an output gap were used for France that was more negative than the one calculated by the OECD: using the OFCE's estimate for France (an output gap of -2.9 GDP points in 2013 instead of the OECD's -1.4 points) and retaining the OECD measure for its partners, France's more favourable relative performance compared to its major trading partners would now explain only half of its trade deficit[\[2\]](#). Part of the deficit observed would therefore be explained by the competitiveness problems of French business (Figure 4).

**Figure 4. France's structural trade balance  
based on OFCE data**



In conclusion, as with any measurement of a structural variable, the evaluation of the structural trade balance is sensitive to the measure of the output gap. Nevertheless, it is clear from this brief analysis that:

- If the French economy is considered to suffer mainly from a supply problem (output gap close to zero), whereas our partners, mainly European, face a shortfall in demand (negative output gap), then the deficit in our trade balance would essentially be cyclical.
- However, if France, like its partners, is also experiencing a shortfall in demand, then only part of our deficit is cyclical, and the rest is related to a problem with the competitiveness of our companies.

This last point seems to us closer to the actual situation of the French economy. While French companies' have undeniably lost some competitiveness, this should not be overestimated: the sluggishness that has characterized our economy for nearly four years is due not only to a lack of supply and the disappearance of the potential for growth – even if this is unfortunately likely to taper off – it is also due to a significant decline in demand.

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[\[1\]](#) For example, Italy and Spain entered a second recession in third quarter 2014, leaving their GDP lower than its pre-crisis level by 9% and 6% respectively.

[\[2\]](#) We find a similar result when the previous version from the OECD (eo95) is used for France and all its partners.

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# **Decline of the euro and competitive disinflation: who's going to gain the most?**

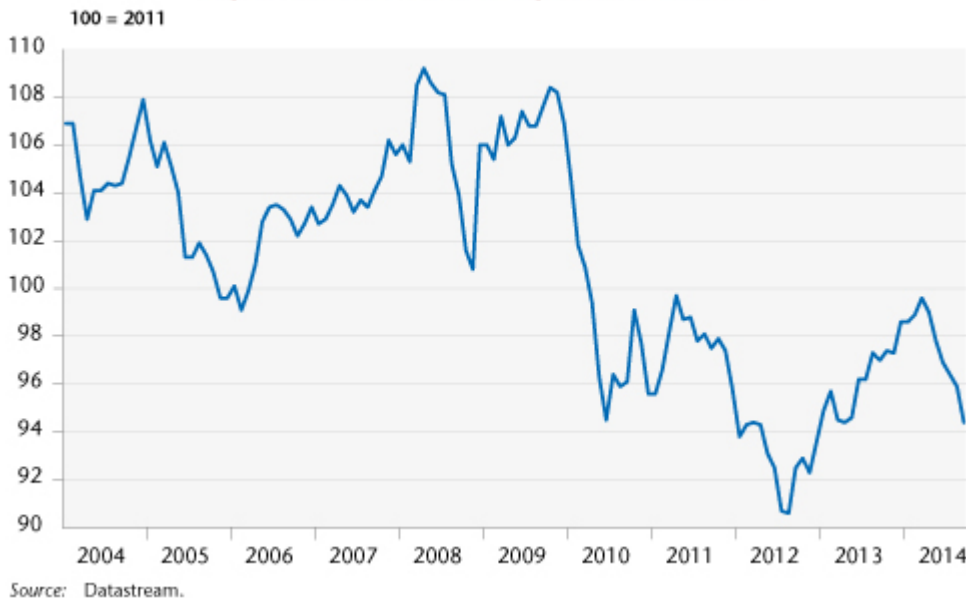
By [Bruno Ducoudré](#) and [Eric Heyer](#)

For nearly two years, between mid-2012 and mid-2014, the euro appreciated against the world's major currencies. Having reached a level of USD 1.39 in May 2014, the euro had increased in value since July 2012 by more than 12% against the dollar. During the same period, the euro appreciated by 44% against the yen and more than 3% against the pound sterling.

Since May 2014, this trend has reversed: after rising by nearly 10% between mid-2012 and mid-2014, the real effective exchange rate for the euro, which weights the different exchange rates based on the structure of euro zone trade, has depreciated by 5.2% over the last six months (Figure 1). In fact, within a few months, the euro has lost nearly 10% against the dollar, more than 3% against the yen and 4% against the British pound. The weakening against the pound

sterling actually began in August 2013, and has reached over 9% today. We expect the euro to continue to depreciate up to the beginning of 2015, with the single currency's exchange rate falling to 1.20 dollars in the second quarter of 2015.

**Figure 1. Effective exchange rate of the euro**



For many business people and economics experts, this decline in the euro represents an opportunity to escape the deflation trap currently threatening the euro zone. Faced with sluggish growth in the zone and an inflation rate that is falling dangerously low, the announcement by the European Central Bank of a quantitative easing programme indicates its willingness to devalue the euro against other currencies in order to support Europe's growth and meet its inflation target.<sup>[1]</sup> The French government also expects a great deal from the euro's depreciation.<sup>[2]</sup> The Treasury Department believes<sup>[3]</sup> that a 10% decrease in the effective exchange rate of the euro (against all currencies) would increase our GDP in the first year by 0.6 percentage point, creating 30,000 jobs, reducing the public deficit by 0.2 GDP point and pushing up consumer prices by 0.5%.

The revival of short-term growth in the euro zone through a depreciation of the euro's effective exchange rate would also

limit the non-cooperative policy of competitive disinflation being implemented in southern Europe (Greece, Spain, Portugal). While European countries trade mostly with each other and compete sharply for export markets, the effort to improve competitiveness through a disinflation policy is bound to fail in the euro zone if all the members adopt the same strategy. This is, however, the strategy chosen by the European Commission, *i.e.* by pushing the countries in crisis to reform their labour markets and cut labour costs. In this light, the depreciation of the euro is needed to support structural reform in Europe and support demand [\[4\]](#) even as fiscal austerity policies are further undermining it.

[In a recent study](#), we attempted to assess the effects expected from the depreciation of the euro. We are interested not in the reasons for the variations in the euro (differential performance, behaviour of central banks) but in its macroeconomic implications (in particular its impact on GDP, prices and employment). To assess the sensitivity of exports to price competitiveness for six major OECD countries (France, Germany, Italy, Spain, United States, United Kingdom), we made estimates using new foreign trade equations that distinguish, within the euro zone, intra-zone trade and extra-zone trade. The elasticities obtained are consistent with the existing literature on this subject. It is necessary to make a joint estimation of the equations for export volumes and import prices: this provides a feedback loop in partial equilibrium for a change in the effective exchange rate on import volumes and export volumes. Taking into account the marginal behaviour of importers and exporters tends to limit the effect of a change in the effective exchange rate on the volumes of imports and exports when these have little market power. Simulations show that, in the euro zone, Spain would have the most to gain from a depreciation in the euro's exchange rate against other currencies, but also from a policy of competitive disinflation (case where Spain's export prices grow more slowly than the export prices of its euro zone



rivals) (Table 1).

**Table 1. Breakdown for the euro zone of a 10% depreciation of the nominal effective exchange rate**

Long-term Impact ... ... of a 10% depreciation of the euro against other currencies (ln %)				
	DEU	FRA	ITA	ESP
Exports	1.3	1.1	1.1	1.7
Imports	-3.2	-2.1	-1.1	-2.3
Export prices	1.4	2.1	1.5	2.0
Import prices	4.3	2.9	2.0	2.9
... of a 10% rise in the prices of competitors in the euro zone (%)				
	DEU	FRA	ITA	ESP
Exports	1.6	1.6	2.1	2.8
Imports	-2.8	-3.3	-1.3	-4.0
Export prices	1.7	3.1	2.9	3.4
Import prices	3.4	4.3	2.3	4.7

Source : OFCE.

For the French economy, we also carried out a more detailed analysis using the OFCE's macroeconomic model *emod.fr*, with the goal of comparing our results with those obtained by the French DG Treasury with the *Mésange* model.

Our results show that a 10% depreciation of the euro against all currencies leads to a gain in price competitiveness for export to France vis-à-vis the rest of the world. The other euro zone countries experience the same gain in competitiveness across all export markets. In this case, the effect on activity would be +0.2% the first year, and +0.5% after three years. Excluding the effect due to the change in price competitiveness, the increased demand resulting from the pick-up in activity among our European partners would be broadly offset by lower demand addressed to France from the rest of the world. On the labour market, the depreciation would create 20,000 jobs in the first year, and 77,000 jobs after three years. The public deficit would improve by 0.3 GDP point in three years (Table 2).



**Table 2. Impact on the French economy of a 10% depreciation in the exchange rate of the euro against all currencies**

(% difference from level in reference scenario)	n	n+1	n+2	n+7
GDP	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.1
Total salaried employment (in 1000s)	20	53	77	43
Household consumption prices	0.9	1.4	1.8	3.6
Public financing capacity (in % of GDP)	0.0	0.2	0.3	0.2

*Note:* A depreciation of the euro would be favourable to short-term activity via an improvement in France's price-competitiveness vis-à-vis non euro zone countries. The positive effect of the euro's depreciation on the activity of our euro zone partners and the negative effect on our non euro zone partners is taken into account.

*Source :* emod.fr.

Finally, we simulated the effect of a 10% increase in the prices of our competitors in the euro zone on the whole of France's export markets. This 10% improvement in price competitiveness vis-à-vis the other euro zone countries would have a positive effect on activity via an increase in exports, investment and employment (Table 3). The impact on activity would be +0.4% in the first year and +0.9% after three years. It would be zero after 10 years. Nearly 130,000 jobs would be created in a period of 3 years and the government deficit would improve by 0.5 GDP point over this period.

**Table 3. Impact on the French economy of a 10% improvement in France's price competitiveness relative to the euro zone countries**

(% difference from level in reference scenario)	n	n+1	n+2	n+7
GDP	0.4	0.8	0.9	0.2
Total salaried employment (in 1000s)	33	90	129	82
Household consumption prices	1.0	1.7	2.3	5.2
Public financing capacity (in % of GDP)	0.0	0.3	0.5	0.5

*Note:* A 10% deterioration in France's price competitiveness relative to the rest of the world is understood to mean a 10% decline in the prices of all France's rivals on its export markets.

*Source :* emod.fr

[1] See C. Blot and F. Labondance, "[Why a negative interest rate?](#)", *Blog de l'OFCE*, 23 June 2014.

[2] See the [speech by Prime Minister F. Hollande on 5 February 2013 to the European Parliament](#).

[3] Economic and Social Report of France's 2014 draft budget bill.

[4] See the [speech by M. Draghi "Unemployment in the euro area", Jackson Hole, 22 August 2014](#).

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# The responsibility pact's obligation of a result

By [Xavier Timbeau](#), @XTimbeau, OFCE

*The original French text was published in the "Rebonds" section of the newspaper Libération on 28 February 2014.*

Is the policy supply-side or demand-side? This debate takes us back decades to a time when the advocates of supply-side policy, Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, wanted to put Keynesian practices into the closet. With respect to the responsibility pact, the debate is moot. There is a clear diagnosis that companies are suffering from such low margin rates that their very survival is threatened. The losses of market share since the 2000s cannot be explained solely by the transition to a post-industrial society. It is thus a priority to boost corporate margins by whatever means necessary. But the restoration of business margins will not be sufficient to put them back on a path of increasing productivity, ensuring their competitiveness in the medium term. Getting back on this path will require numerous reforms, ranging from a better education system to a stable tax system that is as neutral as possible, while making use of the impact of agglomeration and specialization. Coordinating everyone's projects around a comprehensive strategy to make the energy transition is also a

powerful instrument. But the responsibility pact remains silent on this.

To be clear, the responsibility pact aims to improve the situation of business, which could partially offset the decline in activity resulting from the 2008 crisis and the French economy's loss of competitiveness relative to its partners undergoing deflation (including Spain) or due to a rise in the euro. In so far as the pact is financed by taxes or spending cuts, this will constitute a tax depreciation, which will make consumers, employees and those on social benefits pay for the reduction in business costs. When the decrease in the cost of doing business is more focused on lower wages, then we can expect the creation of something like 130,000 jobs in five years, taking into account the financing (see for example the [article by Heyer and Plane in the revue de l'OFCE no. 126](#)). The counterparties, the support of the trade unions and the MEDEF employer association and the general mobilization around a shared bleak diagnosis, will not lead to the revolution that some expect, but it is part of the solution.

A fiscal devaluation at a time when the countries of southern Europe are flirting with deflation and everyone is chasing after a balanced current account, including by curbing domestic demand, will of course not lead the euro zone out of crisis, but instead keep it in prolonged stagnation. Fiscal devaluation is not the right policy for Europe. But so long as Europe has no path other than mass suicide, then fiscal devaluation is the logical response for France.

130,000 jobs will not be sufficient to reverse the trend in unemployment. In the face of the more than one million additional unemployed since 2008, it is downright derisory. But the responsibility pact could be something other than a fiscal devaluation. The obligation of a result, namely to reduce unemployment, does not leave much choice. For the responsibility pact to be accompanied by a significant

reduction in unemployment, the key is not to finance it. The proposal to be made to our partners consists of laxity on our public deficit trajectory in exchange for reforms that everyone would consider structural. Public spending cuts, favourable taxation of business, the prioritization of competitiveness, are all measures that can generate some manoeuvring room.

France has made a commitment to Brussels to reduce its structural deficit by 50 billion euros. If this fiscal effort is made by 2017, almost 1 point of growth will be lopped off every year, and unemployment will virtually not decline at all by 2017. In fact, only the public deficit would be reduced, to 1.2 percent of GDP; this would open up very favourable prospects after 2017, since the public debt will fall without further budgetary cuts and therefore without hindering the decline in unemployment. It's a comfortable scenario for François Hollande's successor, assuming there is one, as they can even use the situation to lower taxes for the rich. With a combination of lower taxes, lower unemployment and a declining public debt, it will look like a "magician" has succeeded an "incompetent".

On the other hand, using the flexibility offered by the 50 billion euros, that is to say, renouncing the 50 billion goal for structural deficit reduction, would yield a very different result. Simulations at the OFCE indicate that unemployment could be cut by nearly 2 points by 2017. Admittedly, the structural deficit would remain unchanged, but the public deficit, what we see, would be on a downward trajectory: in 2017, it would come to just over 2 GDP points (against 4.2 points at end 2013), bringing the public debt into the region of a reduction in the debt-to-GDP ratio. The situation on the eve of the presidential election would be better, and the voting more open.

To develop this manoeuvring room, our partners (and the European Commission) need to be convinced of just how drastic

the situation is. The results of the European elections are likely to remind them and make the obligation of a result clear to all.

Reagan had a great ability to look towards fiscal policy for the motor of his supply-side policy. He thus created the myth that lowering taxes on the rich is good for growth, with consequences for inequality that we are still seeing today. Thatcher believed until the end that reducing the public debt was the right policy. This merely prepared the ground for Tony Blair a few years later. This is the way that political cycles are made, based on results. In the same way, we are responsible for the long-term consequences of the choices we make today.

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## Why not Sundays – but at what price?

By [G rard Cornilleau](#)

With respect to opening DIY stores on Sundays, one aspect of the issue has never been raised. It nevertheless concerns the majority of customers who shop on weekdays during the day. If stores keep their doors open late or outside traditional work days, the labour costs will rise and the structural costs will fall. The rise in cost is due to the wage compensation to be paid to employees who agree to work outside normal hours. It is now clear that such compensation is necessary. The current discussions between the trade unions and the high street chains will undoubtedly lead to an increase in compensation, with wages likely to be doubled for those working Sundays.

Evening work, after 9 pm, will also be compensated. Otherwise, the number of “volunteers” is likely to fall drastically. Nor does anyone really want to argue about whether such compensation is “fair”[\[1\]](#). The reduced structural costs (due in particular to lengthening the duration of capital utilization) should be accompanied by a redistribution of business between neighbourhood shops and the large retailers: as it is unreasonable to expect a higher volume of sales[\[2\]](#), the extension of hours should strengthen the trend towards business concentration, with fewer stores open longer. From the perspective of well-being, this development should be favourable to those who want to shop outside normal times, and can, and unfavourable to those who prefer to do without a local service on a human scale, or would find it difficult to do so, such as the elderly.

This raises the issue of compensating “loser” customers who do not wish to shop outside traditional hours or in less accessible stores. It is not acceptable that in the absence of price discrimination, the customers who demand to be served at night or on Sundays are subsidized. This existence of an implicit subsidy like this is also unjustified from a strictly economic perspective: in order for consumer choices not to be biased, they must bear the cost of the service they want. In other words, Sunday and late night consumers should pay a fair price for the service they use, and the extended hours should not come at the expense of other consumers [\[3\]](#). Fortunately, there is a simple solution to this problem: a mandatory fixed coefficient could be applied to the price of purchases made after 9 pm or on Sundays [\[4\]](#). From then on consumers can choose freely whether to buy during normal hours at the current rate, or outside these hours at the higher rate. Detailed statistical work would be needed to determine the amount of the increase, but it is possible to give an order of magnitude: since trade margins are close to 1/3 and payroll accounts for about 60% of the cost of the business operations, a minimum increase of approximately 15% would be required to

account for the doubling of wages on Sundays and after 9pm. Furthermore, to compensate for the potential loss of well-being due to the impact of non-standard shopping hours in the commercial facilities, a coefficient of 20% seems reasonable. Once store customers pay for the extra service they want, i.e. shopping on Sundays or evenings, it would be possible to agree for traders to freely choose whether or not to open, under the same conditions as today of paying compensation and of verification of the “voluntary” nature of the work outside standard working hours. Based on customers’ response to this price discrimination, the store’s choice of whether to open would be made on a rational basis, without penalizing those that do not do business outside regular hours.

This solution is extremely easy to apply since it would involve only a very slight change in the software coding of store tills. It would also be very easy to verify implementation. It is compatible with greater business freedom and fair compensation for employees. Nevertheless, this could still be opposed for moving in the direction of disrupting social time, which could be avoided only by binding regulations. It seems to me that this could nevertheless be tried out so as to accurately measure the need for opening stores outside “normal” hours: if there are still many takers despite a 20% hike in the bill, then that would indicate a substantial need for longer opening hours. Otherwise, there could be a return to a more satisfactory situation where some stores (or parts of stores) open to meet marginal demand, with most business, and therefore most working time, still focused on the traditional work week and working hours.

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[\[1\]](#) Many professions charge premium rates on Sundays without anybody questioning the legitimacy of this practice. This is particularly the case of the medical profession. If sometime in the future work on Sundays were to become “commonplace”, the Sunday price increases could be called into question,

including for those professions. On the other hand, increases for night work would continue to be justified by the highly negative impact on health.

[2] See the contribution of Xavier Timbeau (<http://www.ofce.sciences-po.fr/blog/never-on-sunday/>)

[3] The prices in stores open on Sundays and at night, such as neighbourhood convenience stores, are already well above average, which avoids excessively subsidizing “non-standard” customers. The higher prices in these shops are readily accepted because they correspond to a specific service. But in the case of a general elimination of regulations on working hours, it is unlikely that stores in traditional channels would spontaneously introduce price discrimination.

[4] This increase is not a tax. The formula associated with this would constitute income for the store, which would be strongly encouraged by competition to lower overall prices.

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# The war between taxis and chauffeur-driven private cars: everyone has their reasons

By [Guillaume Allègre](#)

*Editor's note:* This post was first published on the OFCE blog on 21 October 2013, when the issue of car with driver services was a subject of intense debate. Given the recent events in



France, it seemed appropriate to republish this text by Guillaume Allègre.

*"What's worse is that everyone has their reasons"*

Jean Renoir, *La Règle du jeu*

In the war between taxis and chauffeur-driven private cars (*voitures de tourisme avec chauffeur* – VTCs), everyone has their reasons. We noted in [a previous post](#) that the discourse on innovation masked a classic conflict over distribution between producers, who want to defend their incomes, and consumers, who want an inexpensive quick-response taxi service including at peak times. This conflict is coupled with another no less classic one between holders of licenses with a scarcity value and new entrants, who support opening up the market.

In this conflict the current regulatory system is absurd. Limiting the number of taxi licenses was intended to support the income of independent taxis and prevent them from working too many hours per day to achieve a decent income. However, the authorities have committed two errors. First, by allowing the transfer of licenses, they transferred the benefit of quotas on taxi drivers to the license owners: a taxi driver now must either rent their license or buy it at a price reflecting its scarcity value (230,000 euros in Paris in 2012!). The current situation is even more absurd given that new licenses are [allocated free of charge](#) (to a waiting list): if the *préfet* allocates 1000 new licenses for free, then a value of 230 million euros at market prices will be transferred to the fortunate winners (who may subsequently rent out the licenses)!

The second error is that the government has allowed the taxi license bubble to expand. The high price of licenses clearly reflects that supply is too low relative to demand. But it would now be unfair to penalize those who have just spent a

fortune acquiring a license by, for example, massively increasing their number: why should recent purchasers pay for the shilly-shallying of the regulatory authorities?

### **What's the solution?**

It would be preferable to put an end to a system that generates constant worry about the value of licenses issued for free. But redeeming all the licenses at their market price would be costly and would result in the unjust enrichment of those who received a license for free.

One solution, which was proposed in the [previous post](#), is to buy the current licenses over time (as taxi drivers retire), not at their market value but at their acquisition value plus interest, and to assign new licenses that are free but not transferable. This system would compensate recent purchasers, without contributing to the unjust enrichment of those who have obtained a license for free or at a very low price. It would allow a transition from a system of transferable licenses to a system of non-transferable licenses in which the number of licenses in circulation and the division of the market between chauffeured cars and taxis would depend on the demand for services and not on the nuisance power of one or the other party. This system is of course complex, but it would help to overcome past mistakes in the fairest way possible.

For further information: [Chauffeur-driven private cars: Victory of the anti-innovation lobby?](#)

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# The sources of an industrial renewal

By [Jean-Luc Gaffard](#)

French companies in many sectors have had to deal with a relative increase in unit labour costs, a relative decline in the price of value added, and lower margin rates, meaning that many of them are facing strong competition and are relatively uncompetitive on price due to not having innovated and invested enough in the past. The result over the last decade has been a significant loss of substance in France's industrial network and a worsening foreign trade deficit. The challenge of carrying out an industrial renewal is clearly posed. This is not limited simply to manufacturing but encompasses any activity that is likely to deal with demand on a relatively large scale and is organized on an industrial basis<sup>[1]</sup>.

It is common sense to assume that the solution lies in the renewed capacity of these companies to innovate, to export and quite simply to expand, or in a word, in the ability to regain or acquire the non-price or structural competitiveness that they are currently lacking. The difficulty they face is that their lack of price competitiveness is leading them to seek immediate reductions in cost to the detriment of investment in innovation. Faced with this difficulty, economic policy makers must resolve a real dilemma: either to take measures to compete on taxation, social contributions, or even wages in an effort to restore companies' price competitiveness at the risk of further weakening aggregate demand and ultimately negatively impacting their turnover, or to keep the existing system of taxation at the risk of depriving these companies of the means to invest and innovate.

The consensus of the day naturally denies the existence of

such a dilemma. The presumed neutrality of money and the budget, coupled with the flexibility of the markets for goods and labour, is supposed to help the economy back on the path of steady, stable growth. Businesses, now reassured by the restoration of balanced public accounts and freed of excessive regulatory constraint, are again free to invest.

This consensus embodies a reductive vision of the functioning of market economies. The model of perfect competition, which is the standard in this instance, pictures a world where companies respond simply to price signals sent by the markets for goods and by factors whose operation is immunized against any power exercised by one or another protagonist in these markets. Somehow or other, this is what is meant by the assumption of efficient financial markets whose function is to discipline firms and States. The reality is very different. Markets are naturally and necessarily imperfect. Companies develop strategies on pricing, production and investment that deal with this market environment at the same time that they help to shape it. It is important to recognize this reality before trying to define economic policies suited to it.

### ***The sources of business competitiveness***

In an industrial market economy, business growth comes from *innovation*, in other words from companies' ability to develop non-price or structural competitiveness that is more robust and more lasting than just price competitiveness. Technological or organizational innovation aimed at the creation of new products or services or at the exploration of new markets entails however a *detour away from production*. Time is needed to develop a new production capacity before using it and benefiting from it.

Generally, this new capacity has a higher construction cost than the cost of simply replacing existing capacity. Additional costs must be borne before the corresponding additional income can be collected. A loss of competitiveness,

in principle temporary, is apparent. This could be reflected in increases in current prices (of old products) if the hike in costs is to be passed on immediately or, more likely, by a reduction in margins. The performance of the production of existing goods or services is thus negatively affected by the decision to innovate [\[21\]](#).

In this context, it is still necessary for the company to remain competitive on prices in the short term in order not to lose significant market share to its competitors. It is in regard to this immediate requirement that the issue of *labour costs* comes up. This is a particular issue in the euro zone where in the absence of possible adjustments via exchange rates, legal and regulatory differences on social and fiscal matters create real distortions in competition – and when, furthermore, the international fragmentation of production (in reality the relocation of segments of production to countries where wages are lower but qualifications identical) is providing businesses that have the ability or opportunity to exploit this an advantage in terms of the costs passed on in product prices, margins and investment volumes.

Maintaining or regaining immediate price competitiveness will not, however, suffice. It is still necessary to encourage companies to innovate. But when investments, including intangible investments, are irreversible and when information on the future configuration of the market is not immediately available, it is difficult for companies to do this. They cannot base their decisions on price signals alone. They must be able to secure their investments by acquiring sufficient knowledge about the future market, that is to say, not only the size of demand, but also about competing and complementary offers. The point is to ensure that competing investments do not exceed a certain threshold and that complementary investments attain a certain threshold. This is possible only thanks to practices that have to be considered monopolistic, which are related to different forms of connections between

the companies concerned<sup>[3]</sup>. This kind of *organizational strategy* foregrounds, not a particular company, but a *network of companies*, a sort of ecosystem that often brings together a local dimension and capacity to project outwards. The characteristic of these networks is to balance competition and cooperation. Practices that can be characterized as market imperfections here become incentives to innovate. They help to define the *boundaries* of the firm best suited to the decision to innovate.

What is true of investment in physical capital is equally important for investment in human capital. This investment has a gestation period that essentially amounts to the learning time. This is an essential element in developing new productive capacities. Its products must be secured. The labour relationships specific to a company and to the networks of firms between companies contribute to this. The *stability* of the employment relationship, which binds the employee to the company, is a decisive factor in the learning and retention of professional experience. The *mobility* of employees between companies is another factor. This mobility enables each company to draw on what an employee has learned in another company developing the same sort of skills. It is also a source of increases in wages, but it becomes possible only if companies are in a situation of monopolistic competition.

The difficulty of innovating even when investments are irreversible and market information is incomplete requires having access to financing in order not only to bridge the gap between the profile of costs and the profile of revenue, but especially to have a lengthy financial commitment, that is to say, stable financial relations or control of the capital. The problem most innovative firms encounter is that the assets created are not easily re-deployable (including intangible assets). This constraint, which justifies developing the organizational means to acquire credible information about the

market, requires at the same time being able to enjoy continuing financial support.

### *Goals and means of an industrial renewal policy*

Identifying in this way the stimulants of business growth should guide the policies to be implemented, which are reducible neither to competition policy nor to industrial policy. These policies concern the operation of various markets (goods markets, labour markets, credit markets and financial markets). They make use of a variety of instruments and are situated at different geographical levels.

Industrial policy should set itself the goal of stimulating *cooperation* between companies, including competing firms, and, more broadly, of contributing to the formation of ecosystems involving companies, banks and research institutions. The point here is not at all to designate products or technologies or even territories to promote *a priori*, but instead to help foster market conditions that encourage companies to invest in the ways that seem most promising. The criteria adopted for subsidies or tax relief should meet this objective, which is obviously more complex than that recently put forward of targeting sectors where competition is strong [\[4\]](#). This should be the specific objective of funding for France's "competitiveness clusters", as well as of other forms of public assistance.

Industrial policy has a *regional dimension*, since companies have a tendency to group together to benefit from external effects, in particular learning synergies not only with regard to technological knowledge but also to knowledge of the market. This phenomenon is in line with the willingness of local authorities to assist in the creation of clusters. However, there is no evidence that these local authorities have the information they need or that they can avoid being

captured by lobbies. Competition between them can be expensive when it involves tax competition, which can probably improve the situation of some but only at the expense of others, and which negatively affects overall performance. This inevitably raises the issue of the competence, number and size of the local authorities.

Competition policy is not a substitute for industrial policy. It must pursue the same objective, *i.e. to distinguish between competition and cooperation*. From this perspective, the role that competition policy should play is to punish imperfections and distortions that are harmful to innovation and validate those that foster it. The handling of cooperation agreements in R&D is indicative of this requirement. It cannot be exclusive. Other types of agreement must be able to escape the common law on competition.

Labour market policy must set itself the goal of strengthening the ways and means of *enhancing skills*. First and foremost, this means creating the conditions for stabilizing the employment relationship, which is a source of learning for employees and of making sure that companies retain the skills acquired. These conditions are undoubtedly covered by the employment contract itself, but they are also inseparable from the constitution of the communities or clusters making up innovative business networks. These networks are “local” labour markets in which labour mobility between firms is potentially beneficial to all the partners with respect to mastering new skills. Moreover, an end needs to be put to incentives that contribute to perpetuating the privileging of low-skilled or unskilled jobs. Finally, legal and regulatory conditions that permit businesses to hold onto jobs in the event of temporary difficulties (*i.e. the use of short-time working*) should be strengthened.

Banking policy should set itself the goal of creating *stable relationships between companies and financial institutions*. So-called relationship banks, which collect information on



borrowers, have higher costs than traditional banks, but they also have the advantage of providing resources to businesses facing liquidity problems linked to the characteristics of the innovation cycle. In fact traditional intermediation increases the growth rate of the economy and reduces its long-term volatility, as opposed to market-based funding[\[5\]](#). It is also important to refocus the financial system on traditional intermediation, especially on business credit, and to return to a form of separation between the two types of activity, so that lending to business avoids the consequences of the inevitable vagaries of market activity[\[6\]](#).

Fiscal policy must set itself a dual objective. The short-term goal is to *reduce labour costs* by reducing the rate of employers' social contributions and increasing the tax on value added. The medium-term objective is to *penalize unproductive activities*, those whose contribution to growth is dubious. From this perspective, it is undoubtedly necessary to tax financial services and to make greater use of taxes on wealth and the transmission of wealth, as is recommended by the International Monetary Fund. Without prejudging the possible ways tax reform could be implemented, there is a two-fold importance to reform: first, to promote the production of industrial-type goods and services that are suited to international trade, and second, to carry out a redistribution of income and wealth in order to increase the potential demand for these goods and services.[\[7\]](#)

Industrial renewal poses a major challenge for the French economy, which is now caught between the German economy and the Spanish economy. It requires a reorientation of all the policies that affect and guide corporate behaviour, going beyond just manufacturing firms – policies that are not reducible to either the search for lower costs or to the promotion of new technologies or to compliance with the rules of free competition.

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[1] On the nature of industrial organization, see Chapter 4 of the work by N. Georgescu-Roegen, 1971, *The Entropy Law and the Economic Process*, Cambridge Mass., Harvard University Press.

[2] See C. M. Christensen, 1997, [\*The Innovator's Dilemma\*](#), Harvard, Harvard Business School Press.

[3] G. B. Richardson, 1990, *Information and Investment*, Oxford, Clarendon Press. G. B Richardson, 1998, [\*The Economics of Imperfect Knowledge\*](#), Cheltenham, Edward Elgar.

[4] P. Aghion, M. Dewatripont, L. Du, A. Harrison and P. Legros, 2012), "Industrial Policy and Competition", [\*NBER Working Paper\*](#) 18048.

[5] Bolton P., X. Freixas, L. Gambacorta, and P. E. Mistrulli, 2013, Relationship and Transaction Lending in a Crisis, [\*BIS Working Paper\*](#), no. 17.

[6] T. Beck, 2013, Finance and Growth: Too Much of a Good Thing, [\*Vox eu\*](#).

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[7] Keen M., 2013, Tax Policy in (and for) Hard Times, Vox eu <http://www.voxeu.org/article/tax-policy-hard-times#.Um7TETxwZzA.gmail>

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