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FRANCE briefing: **March/April**

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French National Developments

Major backlash to pension reforms weakens President Macron's standing, deepens his reliance on right-wing allies

- France's controversial pension reform adopted by the government - without parliamentary vote - sparked a series of massive protests in the country which have drawn international attention.

The protests were, as usual under Macron's tenure, violently repressed by the police forces.

- The protests further weakened Macron's political majority, as some of his own MPs [voiced their opposition](#) to the reform and to its forced adoption. Therefore Macron's dependency over its right-wing allies has increased: Les Républicains (The Republicans) party currently weaponises Macron's reliance on them to promote their [new Immigration bill](#).
- As the French constitutional right to strike precludes the payment of a full salary - coupled with the aforementioned institutional violence of the security state - the protests' momentum is slowly decreasing.

This political framework drastically stifles people's ability to force political decisions outside of the established institutional spaces of power.

France condemned over discriminatory policies during UN HRC periodic review

- The UN Human Rights Council led its [periodic review of France](#).

It highlighted some of France's discriminatory and racist structural issues. Nations like Azerbaijan, Pakistan, Afghanistan and Russia [voiced their concerns](#) over France's Islamophobic policies - including the Systematic Obstruction policy, niqab ban and France's lack of recognition of minorities within its population.

- Human Rights NGOs like UNPO (Unrepresented Nations and Peoples Organisations), MAAT (Cairo-based) or the International Human Rights Clinic of the Oklahoma University voiced similar concerns over France's policies 'making minority groups completely invisible in France's legal system', while MAAT recommended repealing or amending the law banning the niqab in public places.
- France [issued a report in response](#), and addressed the non-recognition of minorities stating that:

"France does not intend to withdraw its declaration to Article 27 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights. In accordance with its Constitution, France does not recognise the existence of "ethnic, religious or linguistic minorities" referred to in the Covenant."

Islamophobia

State propaganda unit SG-CIPDR under fire over grant fund scandal

- The state propaganda unit, the SG-CIPDR, has been embroiled in a scandal after it was revealed that it distributed public funds to close associates to the head of the unit, Christian Gravel.
 - According to an [investigation led by the magazine Marianne](#) (unrelated to the fund) and France TV, €355,000 was granted to an organisation, USEPPM, chaired by a friend of Gravel's, which has promoted the work of Mohammed Sifaoui, another friend of Christian Gravel. Sifaoui has published intellectually poor and staunchly Islamophobic work for decades.
 - An official investigation led by a senatorial commission has commenced and will last for 3 months. A judicial inquiry was also opened on the 4th of May.
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