



By: *Tomorrow's Affairs Staff*

# The collapse of the Barnier government leads Macron to a new series of political manoeuvres



French President Emmanuel Macron's sharp political manoeuvring over the past year collapsed on Wednesday in the Assemblée nationale following a **no-confidence** vote in his prime minister, Michel Barnier.

The veteran of French politics and former chief European negotiator with the UK over the terms of its exit from the Union is the third prime minister to resign in less than a year.

In January, Macron **replaced** Elisabeth Borne with the young Gabriel Attal in an attempt to handle pressure from the right to tighten immigration rules.

Attal was Macron's attempt to rejuvenate and energise the increasingly dwindling centrist electorate ahead of last June's European Parliament elections by providing critical support.

This grand and risky manoeuvre failed to deliver results, with the far-right Marine Le Pen's National Rally winning convincingly with around 31% of the vote—more than twice as much as Macron's coalition.

An even bigger surprise was Macron's decision to call snap parliamentary elections in France immediately after the fiasco in the European elections, thereby taking an unprecedented risk.

However, this manoeuvre to alleviate pressure from the rising far-right was successful, as Le Pen's populists only came third in the elections on 30 June and 7 July.

The French president managed to organise the Olympic Games without political unrest in the country by entrusting them to Mr Attal's caretaker government. However, after the spectacular and safe Games in Paris, President Macron continued with risky manoeuvres and refused to hand over the prime minister's mandate to the winning left-wing coalition. Instead, he gave it to Michel Barnier and relied on his political skills to maintain a minority cabinet for as long as possible.

## The budget—an insurmountable obstacle

Barnier's government practically failed the first important test, the adoption of the budget. The far-right National Rally welcomed the opportunity to confront Macron and his government with the nation's biggest problem, the stumbling economy and the over-indebted state.

"This budget takes the French people hostage," said Marine Le Pen, opposing the outgoing prime minister's intention to use the otherwise very narrow room to manoeuvre for a new tax increase and, at the same time, make cuts to public funds.

**The French budget deficit of around 6% of GDP is twice as high as the European guideline**

The French budget deficit of around 6% of GDP is twice as high as the European guideline, and the national debt is around 110% of GDP, the third largest in Europe.

There is no simple or short-term solution to the political crisis. President Macron's new shifts and manoeuvres will determine the main political course, as the Constitution does not provide clear guidelines for this type of situation, which last existed in 1962.

## Few options for the government

President Macron cannot now dissolve parliament and call snap elections, as he already did so in July. He would therefore have to wait a year after the last election to make such a decision.

He might therefore keep Mr Barnier as caretaker prime minister, who will seek the support of parliament to extend this year's budget until early 2025 to prevent a blockage of public payments.

Although possible, such a move would be

politically burdensome for President Macron, as he would have to retain a figure who has lost legitimacy as prime minister.

### Macron has the option to swiftly appoint a new prime minister to replace Barnier

Macron certainly has the option to swiftly appoint a new prime minister to replace Barnier, thereby alleviating some of the burden of illegitimacy from his shoulders. But even such a move would not alleviate Macron's unenviable position, in which his coalition is in a minority in parliament.

Assuming that he would not entrust the mandate to the left-wing coalition that, together with the far right, ousted his prime minister, Macron would effectively be making a cosmetic change by appointing a new person without increasing support for his future government.

According to Reuters [sources](#), Macron comes closest to this option as he rushes to fill the vacuum created by the replacement of Barnier's cabinet.

The most serious contender is Bernard Cazeneuve, who was briefly Prime Minister of France from December 2016 to May 2017. He previously belonged to the centre-left Socialist Party, which he left in 2022 to form an alliance with Jean-Luc Mélenchon's far-left France Unbowed, with which he still forms an alliance today.

## Compromises until the 2027 election

The appointment of Mr Cazeneuve would be a partial concession by Mr Macron to left-wing MPs and possibly a way to secure more stable parliamentary support for the new government.

Furthermore, Macron's semi-compromise with the left could have alleviated some of the

burden of disregarding the will of the voters in this summer's elections, when he entrusted the office of prime minister to the centrist Barnier, despite the left's victory.



*Macron is aware that the threat of a court ruling against Marine Le Pen for misuse of European Parliament funds will limit the pressure*

But even if things stabilise somewhat in this direction, Macron will still have a very difficult year ahead of him in maintaining his presidential authority.

Although he immediately ruled out stepping down before the end of his term in 2027 after the collapse of the Barnier government, Macron will come under intense pressure to do so, particularly from the right wing of Marine Le Pen.

However, Macron is aware that the threat of a **court ruling** against Marine Le Pen for misuse of European Parliament funds will limit this pressure. The public prosecutor's office recently announced the verdict for 31 March. It is calling for a five-year ban from public office, which would prevent Marine Le Pen from participating in the 2027 presidential elections.

These elections are the ultimate political goal for all of Macron's opponents and for Macron, who wants to see the victory of his political legacy. To secure a majority for his political successor, Macron will continue to navigate the current crisis through manoeuvres and political compromises that do not compromise his authority.