

# futuribles

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## Underemployment and Recruitment Difficulties in France

### The Issues around Vocational Training

*Paul Santelmann*

Though in mid-Autumn 2021 the unemployment rate in France has fallen appreciably, it remains distinctly higher than in the other Eurozone countries. However, while there is dynamic job creation, the number of unfilled job offers — a matter of bitter contention — once again reveals the mismatch between supply and demand. How can this phenomenon be explained? In this article, Paul Santelmann shows what a complex problem this is, since it involves a multitude of factors: the low level of employment of young people and seniors; the discrepancy between skills needed and qualifications being gained; regional disparities etc. And this is not even to mention life-long learning which, despite a variety of reforms, still seems highly ineffective, most significantly because of the welter of different actors playing a part in it, both within the civil service and in the training centres, who are not sufficiently apprised of the needs of businesses.

In this article, Paul Santelmann describes the particular situation of the French labour market, examines the role of the different existing recruitment channels and, most importantly, shows how vocational training neither works in matching supply to demand nor in enabling greater occupational

mobility. Given how the situation varies across different sectors of activity and geographical areas, this analysis suggests that it is urgent to review how training actually operates in France, so that it can be made to respond effectively to grassroots needs. The clear implication is that its oversight and management should be decentralized.

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## Teleworking: Post-Covid Perspectives

*Marc Malenfer*

As this issue of *Futuribles* is going to press in late Autumn 2021, several European countries have introduced stricter regulation to cope with an upsurge in the Covid pandemic, and some have reintroduced obligatory teleworking (e.g., Belgium, United Kingdom...). In the longer term, however, with an exit from the pandemic — credibly — in prospect (either through sufficient levels of vaccination or advances in treatment), the question of the use of teleworking represents a major issue for businesses and the economy, for workers (their welfare at work, their mental health etc.), for regions and so on. The questions arise: who is able to telework, in what sectors, to what extent, and with what impact on businesses, the labour force and the (national and international) labour market?

Marc Malenfer explored the subject this autumn for the *Futuribles* International association and has updated his findings for *Futuribles*. He

offers a number of responses to these questions, but also shows that many issues around teleworking remain unresolved and that very different scenarios are emerging, depending on occupation, geographical area, generation etc. All in all, whatever else eventuates, in many societies the Covid crisis and the way it has accelerated the use of remote working will have represented a major break with past working conditions.

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## Do Russians Hold Illiberal, Authoritarian Values?

*Pierre Bréchon and Myriam Désert*

In issue 443 of *Futuribles* last summer, we published some of the lessons from the latest European Values Study (EVS) carried out in 2017-18. In that article, Pierre Bréchon stressed the – still very marked – differences in values between the various geographical areas of Europe (West/South/East; EU members or non-members; the Nordic countries). In this article, co-written with Myriam Désert, he focuses now on the peculiarities of Russian society, analyzing the findings of the EVS surveys carried out in Russia since 1999 and comparing these with the findings from Europe in 2017. Russians have a reputation for relatively illiberal and authoritarian values, a view bolstered by their support for Vladimir Putin over the last 20 years, but is this reputation deserved?

Bréchon and Désert first remind us of the approach the EVS takes to the notion of democracy and how it surveys for it. They go on to look at Russians' aspirations for the advancement of a democratic system, recalling in the process how the weight of their history plays into some responses. They highlight the strong nationalist, xenophobic sentiments of the Russian

people, but when the objectives they view as important are examined in detail, the article shows that pro-democratic opinions are tending to make headway. And, though not very politicized or much inclined toward protest, Russians aspire to be heard by their leaders. Lastly, the authors turn to the development of social ties in Russia, stressing the correlation that usually exists between the strength of those ties and democratic aspirations: they show, for example, that the breakdown of social bonds in recent decades has played an important role in causing nationalist, authoritarian values to predominate, but that the levers the government previously relied on to consolidate those values are losing a little of their effectiveness on account of the country's deteriorating social and economic situation. The authoritarian tendency is still largely dominant and movement away from it is very slow, but it does seem to have begun.

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## A Look at Chinese Soft Power On the IRSEM Report on Chinese Influence Operations

*Inès Cavalli*

While the Covid crisis has exposed the extensive dependence of Western – and, in particular, European – states on strategic materials and goods mass-produced in China, and while Chinese-American rivalry regularly makes headlines, a report published this autumn by IRSEM (the French Defence Ministry's Institute for Strategic Research) has caused a good deal of commotion in France. It relates to "Chinese influence operations" or, in other words, to the way Beijing intervenes with foreign companies, organizations and institutions to consolidate its image and defend its interests. In

particular, it stresses the shift currently underway between a period (currently coming to a close) when China used its soft power to exert influence on the international stage by giving a very positive image of itself, and a new period, characterized by a more offensive attitude, in which engendering fear is seen as a more effective way of serving Chinese interests. Inès Cavalli presents the major features of this very dense report here (more than 600 pages) and explains what it reveals about Beijing's ambitions and the resources (including technological resources) deployed to serve them.

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## The Geopolitics of the Sea

### Issues around Arctic Shipping Routes

*Hervé Baudu and Frédéric Moncany de Saint-Aignan*

Continuing our series on the sea and oceans, this article by Hervé Baudu and Frédéric Moncany de Saint-Aignan focuses on a region that has grown substantially in interest as a result of the observed — and predicted — effects of climate change. We are speaking of the Arctic, the region at our planet's North Pole. Primarily concerned are the five countries bordering the Arctic Ocean: Canada, Denmark, Norway, Russia and the USA, but many other states have been casting an envious eye on the Arctic since the melting of its ice freed up new shipping routes for longer periods of the year. If we add in the mineral reserves present in the region (oil and gas in particular), it is sometimes argued that conditions are ripe for new tensions between the powers concerned.

As this article shows, climate change has certainly altered the state of play in the Arctic, opening up new strategic and commercial opportuni-

ties. Russia is undoubtedly strengthening its military capabilities there and China, though more distant, is definitely taking a great interest in the region, prompting concern in the USA. On the other hand, international law and the governance tools put in place between the countries concerned have so far proved robust. Will this continue to be true in the future?

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## Imaginations of the Sea: From Past to Futures

*Bernard Kalaora*  
*interviewed by Denis Lacroix*

Continuing the series on the sea and the oceans, this interview with Bernard Kalaora offers readers something markedly different from our usual articles. It looks from a philosophical and anthropological, but also a poetic, angle at what the marine space has contributed — and can still contribute — to our profoundly landbound societies. Examining the way perceptions of the sea have changed over time, in literature, painting, scientific representations and the like, Kalaora stresses the importance of living things and the interactions between all the elements of life, together with the need to accept uncertainty, risks and mystery. He presents us with a genuine lesson in ecology, aiming to sensitize us, in the current context of climate change and the finite nature of our planet, to the wealth of resources the ocean can contribute as part of a lasting new alliance between humanity and nature. Comparing Bernard Kalaora's words with what we have seen in Glasgow during the 26<sup>th</sup> conference of the parties to the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (COP26) in terms of the undertakings made by states — a million miles from the measures that need to be put in place — we can see the chal-

lengue a genuine ecological transition represents!

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## What Future for France's Administrative Constitution?

### State Action and its Timescales

*Arnaud Teyssier*

The originality and strength of the French political model were attributable to the fact that the state rested on two pillars, argues Arnaud Teyssier. One of these was political in essence, the other administrative, providing an “administrative constitution” for which Napoleon laid the foundations. De Gaulle understood the advantage of such a harnessing of the political to the administrative sphere and was keen to restore it after France was liberated, taking the view that democracy was a political matter, politics being subject to fluctuating opinions and inevitable short-termism, whereas the republic owed its strength to a robust standing civil service that embodied the general interest and was capable of long-term thinking, even as it confronted emergencies. Our readers will appreciate that the author, in providing this interpretation, is pleading the cause of a misunderstood civil service that is currently under attack.

If democracy is in crisis and state institutions vulnerable, this is the product, in his view, of the destruction over the last 30 years of this happy equilibrium – particularly the questioning of the “administrative constitution” as a result of an ignorance of its specific nature – and the confusion of roles between the political and administrative spheres. Arnaud Teyssier bemoans the dismantling of a civil service that has been subjected to a twofold criticism: as being both all-powerful and powerless. He advocates the restoration of a state with a dual foundation,

one pillar of which is a civil service that upholds institutions and acts strategically. Teyssier's is a carefully reasoned viewpoint, but one that will inevitably prompt debate.

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## Europe Caught in the Migration Trap?

*Jean-François Drevet*

Six years after the migration crisis episode of 2015, which ended in a controversial deal between the European Union and Turkey for containing the inflow of refugees from Syria, a new crisis has been sparked this autumn (2021). This one has broken out on the borders of Poland and is driven by the Belarusian authorities by way of a riposte to EU sanctions. With populist parties gaining ground in many countries and making their case by combating immigration and the Islamism they associate with it, questions of migration are looming larger in public debate on both the Right and Left. It is not unusual, in these debates, for the fierce opponents of immigration to hold the European Union responsible.

However, as this opinion piece shows, matters are not so simple. The EU has, admittedly, promoted the free movement of persons within the Union and, hence, intra-European migration (as a response to real labour-force needs among its most developed members). But both the management of migrant flows from external countries and the integration of migrants fall within the remit of national governments. Each has a role to play then: it is up to the EU to establish an effective agreed migration policy that doesn't heap all the burden on the member states at its borders, and for the individual states to review their national integration policies so as not to play into the hands of extremists of whatever kind. ■