

France's economic standing has deteriorated badly in recent decades, but citizens and visitors alike find plenty of reasons to be there.



EMMANUEL FRADIN FOR THE NEW YORK TIMES

INTELLIGENCE/MARC LAMBRON

Crisis Aside, It's Still France

PARIS — It's amusing to note that as soon as France receives good news, the rest of the world reacts like a pessimistic doctor. The recent awarding of two Nobel Prizes to Frenchmen — Patrick Modiano for literature and Jean Tirole for economics — triggered another round of

Is the country on its decline irreversible? To those who think it is time to administer a final lethal dose to this old European nation, the situation is a little more complicated.

The details of France's crisis are well known, and they are serious problems. Our social and economic model worked beautifully between 1945 and 1975, years of reconstruction and prosperity. Back then France was like Sweden, except you could drink good wines. The French was one of the most generous in the world. Waves of immigrants, in particular those from North Africa, were integrated step by step into all. For the rest of the world, French grandeur was personified by General de Gaulle. France asserted itself as a nuclear power, invented the supersonic plane Concorde and

every year. It was the France of my childhood. Goodbye yellow brick road. In the last 30 years or so, the situation has deteriorated. France started public pay for social programs rose, and the country deep in debt. The pact the Republic had with its citizens doesn't work well anymore, in particular in suburbs where a population of immigrants feels rejected and is recruited by Islamic. The French

Marc Lambron is a writer and a member of the French Academy. This column was translated from the French by Philippe Gélie. Send comments to intelligence@nytimes.com.

are jealous of Germany, their enemy not so long ago, and which is quick to point to the successes of its economic model.

Many French people hoped that François Hollande would reform the country needs. He was a man with a strong economic background as a socialist in his 50s, some sort of progressive modernism. But President Hollande hasn't freed himself from his one of the last political movements in the world cultivating nostalgia for the Marxist worldview.

With more taxes, more public the protective state has become a state that confiscates and the country's resources. Having missed its New Deal, the French left

from all over the world, from Foujita to Hemingway, Neruda to Chagall, wanted to live in France. The French

Bernard Arnault, has inaugurated his Louis Vuitton Foundation, an impressive center for contemporary culture designed by Frank Gehry.

One aspect of the French crisis, rarely underlined, is the excessively somber way France, through its media, tends to see itself. It seems to me that this complacency of France is in large part a journalistic construction that appeared during Nicolas Sarkozy's presidency. Since most French journalists are, they have shifted from bashing the former president to adopting a pessimistic tone in principle, understanding that

As a result, President Hollande's hunted with cartridges manufactured to shoot his conservative predecessor.

This compulsion has set in motion a mimetic echo in the international press. But what newspapers here and abroad write about France with the experiences or attitudes of most people who call France home. My fellow citizens are far more resourceful, courageous and elegant than what's written about them. And most foreign visitors don't leave France with memories of a journey in a ghost nation.

So the theme of the day is not merely the French crisis, it is the dramatized construction by the media of

attended to sell more copies. The journalistic caste is not afraid of stigmatizing politicians and envies power over public opinion. "Emphasize the negative," it sings.

In the end, it all depends on perspective. If you consider life in terms of to be earned, France is certainly not the best country to make a fortune. But if you consider life in terms of taste, there still is a French exception that remains enigmatic, if not irritating, to the rest of the world.

A devouring, squandering mother and her elegant, resourceful children.

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And yet, for a majority of its citizens, living in France remains desirable. The country has one of the highest birth rates in Europe, a sign of confidence in the future. It is the tourist destination in the world, a reflection of the appeal of a certain

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