Beat: Politics

FRANCE'S PLAN COMMEMORATES ITS 80th ANNIVERSARY WITH DIGNITARIES & INTELLECTUALS

HOSTED BY COMMISSIONER CLEMENT BEAUNE

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USPA NEWS - On 1 June 2026, Clement Beaune, Haut Commissioner for Strategy and Planning, brought together a rare constellation of political leaders, business figures and intellectuals at the Institut de France to mark the 80th anniversary of the French Plan. In the André and Liliane Bettencourt auditorium, a few steps from the Académie des sciences, the morning opened under the authority of Xavier Darcos, chancellor of the Institute, and Bernard Stirn, perpetual secretary of the Académie des sciences morales et politiques, before giving the floor to former prime ministers Mrs Elisabeth Borne and Dominique de Villepin, former economy & finance minister Arnaud Montebourg, Nobel laureate in economics and Collège de France professor Philippe Aghion, long?time presidential adviser Alain Minc, Engie CEO Mrs Catherine MacGregor, philosopher?rabbi Mrs Delphine Horvilleur and essayist?philosopher Gaspard Koenig, among others.

The invitation extended to Dominique de Villepin had a particular resonance. As prime minister under Jacques Chirac, he presided over the 2006 reform that formally abolished the Commissariat au Plan and replaced it with new advisory bodies. By bringing him back to the Institut de France for this anniversary, Clement Beaune effectively offered him a platform to explain what had motivated that decision at the time and to reflect, in hindsight, on why the Plan has now been resurrected in a different institutional form.

Created in January 1946 when General de Gaulle appointed Jean Monnet as the first Commissaire général du Plan, this historic institution has been alternately praised as the "laboratory of the Trente Glorieuses" and dismissed as an outdated post?war machine. Invited by the Haut?commissariat à la Stratégie et au Plan, journalist Rahma Rachdi attended the ceremony in person as accredited press and was personally greeted by Clément Beaune, whom she has known for almost a decade, and who now leads the Plan's latest reincarnation and wants to push it toward a more European, future?oriented role, at a time when France faces demographic decline, migration tensions, poor PISA scores and the disruptive rise of artificial intelligence.

MARIE VISOT JOURNALIST FROM FIGARO DID A FIRM AND FAIR MODERATION
In a France marked by demographic decline, migratory tensions, worrying PISA scores and the accelerated rise of artificial intelligence, this anniversary was less a nostalgic commemoration than a test: can the Plan still help France think beyond the electoral cycle, or has the long term become a luxury for which democracies no longer have patience?

The two roundtables were held together by the steady moderation of Marie Visot, editor?in?chief at Le Figaro's economics desk. Without overshadowing the speakers, she kept a firm grip on the timing, allowing each intervention to unfold while ensuring that the debates remained focused and accessible to a broader audience.

Her questions managed to be precise without becoming complacent, probing both the strengths and blind spots of each position from legal and institutional questions to the concrete implications of planning for territories, industry and citizens. In a morning dense with big names and long speeches, her role as moderator helped maintain a balance between deference to experience and the critical distance expected from a journalist.

XAVIER DARCOS / CHANCELLOR OF THE INSTITUT DE FRANCE CALLED THE PLAN AS "LABORATORY OF THE 30 GLORIOUS YEARS"

Xavier Darcos opened the morning by reminding the audience that the Institut de France is not a mausoleum but a living institution, hosting more than 300 events a year. In his words, democracies constantly face the temptation to live only in the short term, and the Plan stands as a counter?logic: "the passion for the long term," and the idea that we are "people of duration" responsible for the past,

the present and the future that we must anticipate. For Darcos, the Commissariat au Plan was never just a reconstruction office. It was the “laboratory of the Trente Glorieuses,” the place where nuclear energy, territorial planning and major infrastructure were conceived before any architect had even drawn the next building. The notion of “Plan” became stronger than the notion of the project itself: an idea, he noted, only becomes action when it is given visibility and continuity.

He recalled Andre Malraux’s 1965 phrase describing the Plan as a “magistère d’influence,” and suggested that France needs to recover that “mystique du Plan” in an era of repeated crises from the 2008 financial crisis to the Covid?19 pandemic and the climate emergency.

Darcos also paid tribute to one of his predecessors, the last Commissaire General before 2005, a philosopher friend whose intelligence and originality helped maintain a strategic spirit even as institutional forms shifted. For Darcos, the very existence of this anniversary, and of a new Haut?commissariat, is proof that France still wants to think in terms of strategies rather than improvisation.

BERNARD STIRN, PERPETUAL SECRETARY, FROM JEAN MONNET TO CLEMENT BEAUNE: 80 YEARS OF PLANNING FOR A STRATEGIC FRANCE IN EUROPE

Bernard Stirn, Perpetual Secretary of the Académie des Sciences Morales et Politiques, introduced his remarks by explaining that past, present and future would be discussed after Claire Chazal’s film as an “indispensable compass” for public action. He recalled how the Plan was originally introduced into France’s eco?political environment to organise national production on the basis of the government’s programme. In 1946, General de Gaulle signed the decree that created, within the presidency of the government, the council defining the missions and activities of the Plan; the first plan was led by Jean Monnet from 1946 to 1952, followed by Jean Masse, both of whom left a strong mark on the institution in the context of post?war reconstruction and a concerted economy, with social dialogue at its core.

After the fifth plan, under President Georges Pompidou, this dynamic gradually ran out of steam. The law of 29 July 1982 led the Constitutional Council to consider that, by its very nature as a multi?annual plan, the Plan law was only indicative.

The decree of 5 March 2006 then abolished the Commissariat au Plan and replaced it with the Conseil d’Analyse Stratégique, ending formal planning for a time; this body later became France Stratégie. The Plan reappeared on 1 September 2020 with a decree appointing François Bayrou, and the decree of 23 May 2025 created a High Commissioner for Strategy and the Plan, Clément Beaune, who is at the origin of today’s ceremony. Bernard Stirn explained that this new Haut Commissariat is designed to anchor public action in time, relying on science and expertise, in order to build a strategic nation within Europe. By retracing the chronology of the creation, disappearance and re?creation of the Commissariat au Plan, he placed today’s institution back into its broader politico?social and historical context, stretching over eighty years.

PHILIPPE AGHION ECONOMICS NOBEL PRIZE : GROWTH, AI AND THE NEED FOR NEW LONG-TERM INCLUSIVE POLICIES
For Philippe Aghion, Nobel laureate in economics and professor at the Collège de France, the Plan’s history cannot be separated from the economic trajectories it supported. Eighty years ago, he recalled, the future of France was highly uncertain, and the creation of the Plan under Jean Monnet was meant to give the nation a set of guidelines that would look beyond immediate reconstruction and structure long-term growth.

He underlined how planning contributed to the “Trente Glorieuses,” helping France catch up with the United States in terms of GDP through targeted investments in capital, nuclear energy and major industrial champions. Yet he also stressed that, since the 1990s, Europe’s relative decline has been evident, with insufficient investment in long-term research, too little venture capital for innovative start?ups, and a lack of foreign investors in key sectors. Referring to the Draghi report on European competitiveness, Aghion argued that Europe has not fully seized the opportunities of the third industrial revolution, particularly in digital technologies.

He warned that France’s wealth per capita has fallen significantly relative to the United States, while poverty among younger generations has increased. In this context, artificial intelligence is a double?edged sword: it will destroy some jobs but create others, and the real question is whether public policy can manage this transition through education, skills and innovation. Aghion proposed three main pillars:

a more inclusive and innovative education system, capable of identifying and supporting highly talented students rather than letting them “get lost”;

- A labour market and training system that rehabilitates manual work and emphasises soft skills and versatility;

and
- A high?tech strategy that builds European-scale infrastructure and reduces dependence on non?European digital platforms.

He concluded that AI could add up to 0.7 percentage points to annual growth for a decade if properly integrated, but only if competition policy, industrial policy and research funding are redesigned to avoid excessive concentration and to support disruptive innovation.

CATHERINE MACGREGOR, ENGIE’s CEO LEADING DECARBONISATION AND INCLUSION AT THE TOP OF THE CAC 40
Catherine MacGregor, Chief Executive Officer of ENGIE, reminded the audience that in 2025, and still in 2100, companies will remain at the heart of our societies, because they generate wealth, recognise value creation at every level, contribute to public finances, and support innovation and research over the long term. She stressed that firms have a responsibility not only to the economic sphere but also to broader societal issues, from inclusion and mental health at work to the employment of seniors and the feminisation of teams through training, role models and new managerial practices.
She highlighted the initiative of 35 companies working together for a more inclusive society, narrowing the gap between school and work at a time when artificial intelligence is disrupting jobs and skills. In her view, no business leader genuinely wants to “dehumanise” their company. Instead, she argued, the combination of the Paris Agreement, pressure from employees and the realities of climate change has already forced energy players to pivot their business models towards long?term resilience.

France, she said, must reorient the results of its strategic energy choices to build a system that is both competitive and resilient, while also massively increasing electricity production and reducing the share of gas in the energy mix.

MacGregor insisted that gas will still play a role as a flexible back?up, especially in winter, when demand can be five times higher than in summer but that this role must be decarbonised. Here she championed biomethane as a flagship of the circular economy, with clear benefits for farmers and rural territories, and called for responsibility rather than retreat in fulfilling this mission. As the only woman heading a CAC 40 company, she also embodies a symbolic dimension: ENGIE’s ESG agenda, particularly on inclusion and disability, is closely linked to her personal commitment as a leader.

Born in Sale, Morocco, and a graduate of Ecole Centrale de Paris, Catherine MacGregor has spent her career in the energy sector, building deep operational expertise and a strong understanding of international issues. Since taking over as CEO of ENGIE in 2021, she has positioned the company as a French and global champion of decarbonisation, nuclear and electricity, while using the 80th anniversary of the Commissariat au Plan to underline how energy choices, social inclusion and long?term planning are now inseparable.

ELISABETH BORNE, FORMER PRIME MINISTER, DEFENDING LONG-TERM PLANNING TO STRENGTHEN FRANCE’S SOVEREIGNTY AND INDUSTRIAL FUTURE
Elisabeth Borne, former prime minister and now MP for the Calvados, recalled how, in a moment of extreme fragility after the Second World War, France made a decisive choice under General de Gaulle: instead of entrusting its future to the “fires of the moment”, it chose to plan, invest and prepare, deciding to shape its own destiny rather than endure it. In her view, this is what the Plan has embodied for nearly eighty years, transforming the country, supporting industrial modernisation, and enabling the development of key infrastructures such as the rail network, while structuring France’s economic and strategic power. She stressed that collective decisions such as the choice of civil nuclear energy training generations of researchers and engineers and building an entire industrial sector continue to bear fruit today in terms of competitiveness, ecological strategy and energy sovereignty, just as the aerospace sector underpins France’s ability to project and defend itself in an increasingly fragmented and uncertain world marked by technological ruptures.

For Elisabeth Borne, talking about industry means talking about prosperity, sovereignty and the ability of public finances to sustain the social model and innovation; in other words, about France's capacity to choose for itself in twenty or thirty years rather than submit to the choices of others. The Plan, she argued, reintroduces long?term time into public debate, through work on demographics, territorial fractures, reindustrialisation and social balances, allowing France to anticipate rather than endure crises, whether sanitary or ecological, in a world that "moves too fast". The challenge is to hold together visibility and adaptability: the country needs a clear course, citizens need collective visibility, and the identification of vulnerabilities must guide long?term investments for sovereignty and the maintenance of a nation's ability to control its destiny.

FOR DOMINIQUE DE VILLEPIN FORMER PRIME MINISTER: "THE PLAN IS DEAD, LONG LIVE THE PLAN"

Dominique de Villepin, former prime minister, framed his intervention as part of a "perpetual debate" in French history, rooted in the legacy of the June 1946 project carried by Charles de Gaulle and Jean Monnet. The Plan, he argued, has always been an evolving work. As prime minister in 2006, he himself presided over the reform that abolished the Commissariat au Plan, officially to modernise the institutional architecture. Today, he acknowledged, the Plan needs to be renewed again, but this time with a strong sense of national continuity and a central role for the President of the Republic. France, he said, has entered a new age of doubt and moral uncertainty, in a world of scarcity where the State often appears powerless. In that context, the Plan historically provided "reassuring results" major infrastructure, territorial management over time at a moment when planning seemed to offer a framework for action.

Dominique De Villepin insisted that the current context deindustrialization, heatwaves, the impact of artificial intelligence on employment makes planning both more necessary and more complex. How, he asked, can one plan for recovery in a world that has become so unpredictable and interdependent, where entire chains of production and decision?making can be disrupted by global shocks? For him, the core of the Plan idea has always been the control of finance and the balance between market forces and central planning. France chose a mixed model, partly planned and partly regulated by markets, but without fiscal and budgetary visibility, he warned, no long?term strategy can hold. This is why he called for an organic law on planning, giving the Plan a clear legal framework and restoring a sense of direction over several years.

For Dominique de Villepin, the Plan must be humanist, serving the general interest in both the civic and economic spheres. He insisted that it is the President's responsibility to ensure long?term stability and to protect the country's vital interests. A Plan, he said, must be "by humans, with humans and for humans", relying on scientists, major projects and forward?looking assessments of skills and needs. That includes evaluating the impact of AI on youth employment and anticipating continuous training, as France once did for gas infrastructure or large industrial systems. In his closing line, he called for a return to the Plan's original spirit, one that recognises vulnerabilities, respects differences and addresses essential needs such as housing, transport, food and services, before concluding with a formula that summed up his paradoxical role in this story: "The Plan is dead. Long live the Plan."

ARNAUD MONTEBOURG: "MY PLAN FOR THE FRANCE OF TOMORROW"

Arnaud Montebourg, former minister for the economy, industrial recovery and the digital sector, and founder of the "Made in France" movement, took the floor under the banner "My Plan for the France of Tomorrow". He began with a simple observation: in everyday life, "the Plan is everywhere". When he meets his banker, he joked, he always arrives with a business plan; wherever one goes, one is asked about a plan. The key point, he argued, is that any collective objective must be both shared and realistic, capable of producing tangible effects within a reasonable horizon rather than disappearing into distant abstractions.

Arnaud Montebourg called for multiple plans rather than a single monolithic document. Existing tools already exist, he noted, such as multi?annual energy programming laws for the prime minister. But for him, a central objective should be to rebuild a collective base that ensures, over the next 30 to 50 years, that the French are guaranteed shelter, food and the financing of a social model that currently weighs heavily on public finances.

France, he warned, is almost unique in combining both a chronic public?deficit problem and a structurally negative trade balance. In his words, the trade deficit of tens of billions of euros each year should be seen as a permanent cheque written abroad, and correcting it would require a massive reindustrialization effort and the creation of around one million jobs and thousands of new square metres of productive activity.

He pointed to a report by economist Olivier Garnier, which, he said, set out the contours of such an effort but was rejected by

government. For Montebourg, there is currently no political figure clearly emerging to carry a national recovery project, and he therefore offered his contribution as an “ordinary citizen” to this collective endeavour. He concluded with a strong affirmation of his political culture: “Long live French?style planning, and long live the Plan.” Coming from a former minister known for his battles over industrial sovereignty, notably his opposition to the sale of Alstom’s energy branch to an American group, the message sounded like both a defence of planning and a hint that he remains available for future service.

GASPARD KOENIG, PHILOSOPHER, FROM MONTAIGNE TO DARWIN TO REINVENT A MORE HUMBLE AND SPONTANEOUS COMMISSARIAT AU PLAN

Gaspard Koenig, essayist and philosopher, chose to place his intervention in an aesthetic and philosophical register from the outset, opening with Montaigne’s famous line: “Nothing beautiful is made by chance.” For him, Paris is the most visited city in the world not because of Haussmann boulevards or Corbusier architecture, but because of its poets. He stressed that many of our devices and infrastructures are not the product of central planning, and reminded the audience that we know perhaps only 1 percent of the insects that inhabit the soil a living layer of humus that has been at the heart of evolutionary thinking since Darwin.

Koenig drew on Charles Darwin’s late work on earthworms, quoting the naturalist’s amazement: “It is wonderful to think that on such an immense scale, the whole of the superficial mould is continually passing through the bodies of worms.” He added another well?known Darwinian insight: “The species that survive are not the strongest, nor the most intelligent, but those that best adapt to change.” For Koenig, the French style of planning has pushed rationalist control to an extreme, whereas Darwin’s focus on humble creatures such as earthworms invites us to look down at the soil beneath our feet rather than only up at the stars and to recognise how much life depends on processes we barely see.

From there, he proposed a radical shift: to rename the Commissariat au Plan as an “Office for Spontaneous Order”, whose mission would be less to prescribe outcomes than to create the conditions for spontaneity and emergence. In his view, planning should provide a framework a kind of “tough clay” strong enough to support a solid society, while leaving room for local initiatives, bioregions and specific territories to flourish.

He suggested around twenty bioregions in France and Europe, rooted in their own landscapes and “granite lands”, with the State setting only the broad rules of the game, as some American experiments did in the 1980s.

Koenig’s intervention brought an anthropological and existential dimension to the debate, insisting on mutual aid and solidarity with the most vulnerable, and on the need for humans to rethink their place in a “nurturing Earth”. By returning to Darwin’s fascination for earthworms which tirelessly stir the soil and humus, making land fertile and enabling new forms of life, he underlined how infinitesimal and fragile human beings are compared with the hyper?powerful forces of nature. This perspective echoed contemporary concerns about climate change, migration and demographic shifts, and suggested that the Commissariat au Plan should integrate these long?term ecological and social vulnerabilities at the very heart of its work.

YOUNG CLEMENT BEAUNE IS REVIVING PLANNING LAWS FOR FRANCE & REINVENTED THE PLAN IN EUROPE OVER HIS COMMISSIONER’s POSITION

Clément Beaune, Commissioner for the Plan, opened his intervention by thanking the Institut de France for hosting the celebration of the Plan’s 80th anniversary and for offering a space for debate, reflection and projection. He insisted that this was more than a commemorative event: France, he said, stands at a crossroads, and the diversity of voices brought together that morning had to be heard and reconciled. In a house dedicated to “immortality”, eighty years might seem little, but for an institution born in the immediate aftermath of war, and which has survived two major ruptures and 54 governments even practicing a form of institutional “resurrection” this anniversary carries symbolic weight.

Beaune recalled that the Plan was, at the outset, a “slightly crazy” idea, launched by General de Gaulle in a period of rationing and ruins, and entrusted by the 1947 decree to Jean Monnet and a cohort of “good fairies” representing the diversity of post?war France.

The Plan emerged in parallel with other pillars of the French social model, the ENA (now INSP), the civil service, social security all of them the work of “numbers people, figures people and ideas people”, as he put it. The Plan was not only a system of targets and indicators; it was also a community of visionaries such as Monnet and de Gaulle, a meeting place and, in his words, a kind of “hive” for planners and policymakers, echoing the President of the Republic’s description of it as an ecumenical space.

Quoting one of Jean Monnet’s famous remarks “Give me a dining room and I will make a Plan” Clement Beaune evoked the early days

when plans were literally drafted around a table, in conversations that blended pragmatism and imagination. To keep that spirit alive, he announced the creation of a Jean Monnet Prize for Youth, aimed at contributors under 30, so that new generations can submit their projects, ideas and proposals. Europe itself, he reminded the audience, was one of Monnet's "crazy ideas" from the Rue Martignac offices of the first Commissariat au Plan, through Robert Schuman's foreign ministry, to the founding of the European Coal and Steel Community in the early 1950

Clement Beaune argued that, in our time, the key word should be arbitration rather than compromise. Governing, he said, now means making clear, transparent trade?offs and learning to synthesise competing priorities. Assuming what he called the "vintage charm" of the Plan, he nevertheless made a very contemporary announcement: the proposal to bring back planning laws as a distinct legal category. These laws, which never fully disappeared from the French legal order, could be revived as "grand options" laws, similar to the Portuguese model, setting out strategic priorities in health, education, energy or demographics for four or five years, supported by a multi?annual financial framework. In his view, such a framework could also be extended to the European level, aligning national and EU?level planning over a seven?year horizon.

"Let us be confident and constructive," he urged, calling for the 80th anniversary to be seen not as a nostalgic exercise but as a moment of rigorous optimism. For Beaune, the Plan remains a vector of hope, provided it is carried forward with discipline, imagination and a willingness to confront long?term challenges. He closed on an enthusiastic, almost fraternal note, describing the morning as intellectually rich, bringing together scientific, social, moral, political, religious, spiritual and even anthropological perspectives "among brothers and sisters", and inviting further contributions from all those who wish to feed into the Plan's work.

Beyond his speech, Clément Beaune's own trajectory gives this "new Plan" a particular colour. A former MP for Paris's 7th constituency (Renaissance) and previously Secretary of State for European Affairs (2020–2022, under Prime Minister Jean Castex), then Minister Delegate for Transport (2022–2024), he succeeded François Bayrou as head of the Haut Commissariat au Plan, a nearly post?war institution that Bayrou led before becoming prime minister. At just 44, Beaune brings a deliberate "new wave" tone, aligning the Plan with a younger generation of leaders and with a clearly europhile orientation.

A seasoned insider of both French high administration and Brussels politics, he accompanied President Emmanuel Macron, portrayed here as an uncontested leader in a 27?member European Union, in formal and informal meetings with the European Commission, the European Council and the European Parliament. These networks and experiences are likely to strengthen the Plan's role as a French and European think tank, especially on issues such as demographics (declining birth rates, rapid ageing), the growing reliance on caregivers and home?help workers, and the looming shortage of support for the elderly. All of this is unfolding at the very moment when artificial intelligence is accelerating at a dizzying pace, with both positive and negative impacts that remain largely unknown.

For the Commissariat au Plan, this is yet another equation to solve: how to help "young leader" generations now in charge of public policy and think tanks to design long?term strategies in a pre?campaign period leading up to the 2027 presidential election, an additional unknown in the equation, since no one yet knows who will steer France's destiny from May 2027 onwards. In this sense, Clement Beaune's Plan stands at the intersection of memory and anticipation, national reflection and European coordination, and between human vulnerabilities and technological disruptions.

Seen from the reporter's notebook, the 80th anniversary felt less like a nostalgic commemoration than a rehearsal of the questions France will have to confront between now and 2035–2050: how to plan in an era of permanent crises, how to integrate artificial intelligence without sacrificing social cohesion, how to finance a social model while trade and public deficits accumulate, and how to rebuild trust in public institutions. Clément Beaune's ambition to "dust off" the Plan and anchor it more firmly in the European landscape will ultimately be judged not by commemorations, but by the capacity of this historic tool to inform concrete choices on education, demographics, energy, AI and territorial fractures.

For now, one thing is clear: France still needs a place where it can think beyond the next election and imagine the country it wants to be in ten, twenty or thirty years. On 1 June 2026, at the Institut de France, the Plan once again played that role, at least for a morning. The rest will depend on whether the words heard that day can be turned into policies, and whether the long term can regain a voice in a democracy saturated by the short term…

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