

World



Don't make Brexit mistake, new PM warns nationalists

President Macron's prime minister criticised French right-wing Eurosceptics yesterday, comparing them to Brexiters who he said weakened Britain after making false promises of "happy days" (Adam Sage and Bruno Waterfield wrote). Gabriel Attal made the claim as he used his maiden parliamentary speech as head of government to rebuff attempts by the populist National Rally to exploit nationwide protests by farmers ahead of June's European elections.

With the protests being driven in part by anger at EU rules, Jordan Bardella, National Rally's chairman, has been calling for France to declare itself exempt

from some decisions made in Brussels. Although the party has dropped its commitment to organise a Brexit-style referendum in France, Bardella, 28, described the EU as the "enemy of the people" in a speech to farmers last week.

Attal, 34, responded by saying: "Those who advocate not applying [EU] treaties are in favour of a disguised 'Frexit' that would weaken France." He went on to claim that "not a single" French person wanted to leave the EU.

"Less Europe is less power for France," he said. "I will only take one example and it will hurt some people: Brexit. Its supporters promised happy days for the British economy and the British people. Last week, because of Brexit, Britain's last



blast furnaces shut. No more steel is made in the UK. In France on the other hand, notably because of investments from Europe, industry is reviving."

His speech setting out the government's legislative programme represented an attempt to regain the

As the farmers' protests continued, Gabriel Attal said that "Frexit" was not the answer

political initiative amid the farmers' protests that have blocked dozens of roads around the country, including in the Paris region.

France's first openly

gay prime minister, who was appointed by Macron to reinvigorate a government accused of having run out of steam, suggested that the country could overcome the divisions laid bare by the farmers' anger.

He pointed to himself as a case in

point, noting that just a decade after the country had been split by a law authorising gay couples to marry, he was able to be "prime minister while openly assuming [my] homosexuality. In all that, I see the sign that our country is moving, that mindsets are evolving".

French leader makes a meal of diplomacy

France Oliver Moody

France has long taken pains in its culinary diplomacy, with the chefs at the Élysée treating distinguished guests to blue lobster, exquisite patisserie and vintage bottles of Mouton Rothschild.

Its northern European partners do not always reciprocate in kind. Months after President Macron was welcomed to Hamburg with a *Fischbrötchen*, a roll stuffed with fried fish and raw onions, he must brace himself for another hearty but plain staple on his state visit to Sweden this week: a plateful of *pyttipanna*, a dish of sautéed potatoes, onions and sausage chunks traditionally cobbled together from leftovers.

The head of one of the most gastronomically proud states on the planet may console himself with the thought that the hash will be served with béarnaise sauce instead of the usual fried egg and pickles.

Swedes are divided over the merits of *pyttipanna*, "pieces in a pan", which is eaten in various forms across the Nordic countries. While the dish remains so popular it is often sold in frozen packs, some regard it as bland and stodgy.

Ulf Kristersson, the Swedish prime minister, has also invited Macron for a traditional *fika*, or coffee break, with a *kanelbulle*, or cinnamon bun.

Stockholm will hope that these efforts go down better than Germany's "fish-sandwich diplomacy". In October shots of Macron grimacing as he bit into a *Fischbrötchen* beside Olaf Scholz, his German counterpart, went viral.

On Tuesday Macron became the first French president to visit Sweden in a decade, for a discussion on European security. Sweden's bid to join Nato, which has made slow progress since May 2022, is gathering momentum. Last week the biggest obstacle fell away as President Erdogan and the Turkish parliament ratified its accession, leaving only Hungary as the hold-out.

Crack epidemic sweeps Germany

The Taliban's ban on harvesting opium has pushed addicts towards a dangerous new hit, Phyllis Akalin reports

The receptionist smiles brightly at a man waving a small bag of yellow rocks. "Have you seen *Wonka*?" she asks him by way of greeting.

He pulls a face. "I don't like films in which they're singing and dancing."

She laughs. "Fair enough. You can go to number 12. Need anything?"

He takes a pipe and heads off through the doors to smoke crack.

The entry to Düsseldorf's only consumption room, run by a city-funded drug help centre, is hidden in a small courtyard around the corner from Worringer Platz, the main meeting point for the city's narcotics scene. It offers 17 spaces for smoking and injecting and soon it will have 19 — not nearly enough for all users in the city.

The number of single crack uses in the consumption room rocketed from 210 in 2016 to 16,615 in 2022. In the past year that figure has doubled to 31,268.

And while cocaine consumption has remained steady over the past three years, the share of crack within that figure increased from 54 per cent in 2021 to 72 per cent in 2022.

"Crack has arrived in Düsseldorf," said Michael Harbaum, head of the help centre. "If there is a new substance on the market that can make you very happy and is very cheap, then of course that's tempting for addicts."

Many of the city's heroin addicts have switched to smoking crack because it is cheaper, easier to consume without attracting attention, and has a high reward factor. One is Saida, 51, who first took heroin 25 years ago. "I've stopped doing heroin but now I smoke crack," she said. "It numbs the pain."

Crack, often called "rocks", is powdered cocaine cooked with baking soda and water. It is a stimulant, unlike the sedative heroin, and can lead to excessive confidence and aggression. One dose can cost as little as €3 in Düsseldorf, or €70 for a gram.

Philipp Braun of Flingern Mobil, an organisation that helps people struggling with addiction and homelessness, said he had noticed an increased demand for pipes and baking soda at its café, which issues safer-use material. "Crack numbs emotional and physi-

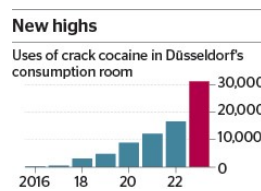
cal pain, and in theory you can consume it almost without limits," he said. "However, the user decay is starker than anything we've seen. Some of them don't sleep for days and therefore become much more aggressive."

For more than 20 years crack had been largely limited to Hamburg, Frankfurt and Hanover, but now it has become one of the main drugs in all big German cities.

Heino Stöver, director of the Frankfurt Institute of Addiction Research, said: "Crack has become more popular in all of Europe, and in Germany we see it especially strongly. The glut of cocaine in Europe is bigger than ever before. And the cocaine being sold is extremely good quality."

When the Taliban banned the harvesting of opium poppies in Afghanistan in 2022, cultivation dropped by 95 per cent, according to the UN Office on Drugs and Crime. As a result, crack and cocaine have replaced heroin. Crack is very profitable for dealers because a small quantity of cocaine can stretch to many small doses. Some use rat poison to dilute the drug, which has a similarly stimulating effect.

The impact of crack on German city centres can be seen at Worringer Platz, a short walk from the central railway



station in Düsseldorf. Addicts gather there between a bus stop and a small Italian restaurant. "The area has become smaller but more people started coming. That led to conflicts, and residents complaining," Braun said.

When the city increased the police presence at the square, many drug users relocated to a nearby construction pit. Last summer some 60 people were living there in tents and makeshift sheds. They were evicted in November.

Shirley Steinkühler, a social worker at Flingern Mobil, said: "The pit had to go because of the conditions, including drug dealing, prostitution, rape and violence. But now we have to look for these people. They don't come to us."

The November eviction saw some users return to Worringer Platz, while others moved under a bridge near the

district court, known as the rat tunnel. "[Drug use] has become more visible because of the disappearance of dark corners and empty buildings where people can hide away," Harbaum said.

Gökhan Cakil, who works at a nearby off-licence, said: "Once someone hit an employee with a bottle. It's dangerous at night, especially in the summer. They do drugs in public, right outside our windows. Most of them are good people but on drugs they lose their minds."

Chrissi, 38, who was in prison for four years, said things have worsened. "It's a catastrophe. People steal from each other all the time. Since June, I've been robbed ten times."

She has been smoking crack for 12 years. Sometimes she stays awake for up to ten days.

"At the moment I am smoking a lot — one gram a day," she added. "It makes you feel like your problems disappear. That's why you do it, to forget your problems, to fly a little, to distract yourself. But that feeling doesn't last long, one minute or two."

Saida visits the consumption room every other day.

"Saida means the happy one, the lucky one," she said. "That doesn't fit. But maybe that's yet to come. That's what I wish for, anyway."