

## FRANCE: Government unlikely to survive censure motion

A motion of censure will be voted in the National Assembly (AN) on 4 December. Barring an (unlikely) last-minute deal, Prime Minister Michel Barnier's minority government is set to lose, forcing him to tender his resignation to President Emmanuel Macron.

### Last-minute offers

Barnier triggered article 49.3 of the constitution after negotiations with Marine Le Pen's far-right National Rally (RN) over the social security budget (PLFSS), the first out of a set of three budget bills. Barnier had offered highly visible concessions, hoping that these would motivate the RN to eventually abstain in a vote under article 49.3. This would have left the government in place and let the PLFSS pass without any further parliamentary vote.

Barnier had proposed to remove the initially planned electricity tax increase from the also upcoming 2025 budget bill (PLF). Moreover, in a written statement circulated on Monday, his office explicitly mentioned a phone call with Le Pen. In response to her demands, Barnier offered to also scrap an envisaged reduction in the reimbursement for prescribed medications.

### Competing incentives

Le Pen's potential voters on the wider center-right might dislike the instability associated with the lack of a budget and a government collapse, however, her own core electorate largely desired an overthrow of Barnier's government. As [discussed](#), her looming court case may have further incentivized Le Pen to prioritize her core electorate.

Barnier triggered article 49.3 rather than putting the PLFSS to a final vote first to allow further amendments. The concessions on electricity and medications were the maximum the government felt it could offer without undermining its fiscal consolidation project. Le Pen's requests to entirely abandon the planned delay to the indexation of pensions was an offer Barnier was not prepared to make.

### Next steps

Against this backdrop of non-aligned incentives, a last-minute deal now seems unlikely. Likewise, government calls on the moderate Socialist (PS) wing of the leftist New Popular Front (NFP) are unlikely to succeed, given Barnier's earlier nomination with the tacit support of Le Pen, and his subsequent focus on negotiating with the RN, rather than the NFP.

In the AN on 4 December, the RN and the NFP are, therefore, likely to vote together against the government. Once Barnier resigns, Macron will likely ask him to continue as a caretaker. The alternative option of formally renominating Barnier looks unlikely given the manifest lack of a majority. With no PLF passed, the caretaker government will likely present a special law under article 47.4 of the constitution.

### Signposts

A special law would effectively roll over the 2024 accounts without any of the previously envisaged spending cuts or tax hikes, while empowering the government to keep collecting taxes. Beyond this, government formation will be watched, including the degree of Macron's personal involvement in the process. Barnier's caretaker status could drag on, as new elections are not possible before the summer.

### Carsten Nickel

Deputy Director of  
Research  
+44 20 7186 8873  
carsten.nickel@teneo.com

Looking further ahead, article 16 of the constitution provides the president with special powers in case of major emergencies. The current political crisis hardly qualifies, but geopolitical developments in Europe could further fan respective speculation. There is also talk about Macron's potential resignation, triggering presidential elections within 35 days. While this seems unlikely, the snap polls earlier this year should at least serve as a reminder of Macron's penchant for lonely decisions.

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**Carsten Nickel**  
Deputy Director of  
Research  
+44 20 7186 8873  
[carsten.nickel@teneo.com](mailto:carsten.nickel@teneo.com)

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