

Macron bounces back on grand listening tour

France

Charles Bremner Paris

Compassion is not a quality that France had come to associate with President Macron: the yellow vest uprising that began in November was spurred by the haughty aura he often exuded in the 18 months after winning the presidency.

At the weekend, though, he spent 14 hours non-stop talking, eating and drinking with men and women of the land at the Paris international agricultural show, listening to their woes and reassuring them, throwing his arms around one impoverished retired farmer.

Visits to this celebration of France's rural soul are a ritual for presidents, but Mr Macron, seen as the ultimate city slicker, broke the duration record.

The trip was part of a climb back for him from December, when *gilets jaunes* protesters were rampant and the danger of mob attack was so high that he and

his wife, Brigitte, were shown how to take refuge in the bunker below the Élysée Palace. Three months into the longest insurrection for decades, Mr Macron's fortunes are rising, thanks to his energetic response and the failure of the rebels to agree on anything besides their contempt for him and each other.

As well as showing his caring side — helped last week by spending a night with the homeless on Paris streets — the president has scored by leading his “great national debate” from the front. He launched the public consultation in December to defuse the *gilet jaune* movement and he has appeared in shirt-sleeves taking questions for hours at a time at six town hall meetings. Bantering with village mayors and pensioners in sessions of up to six hours, without notes, he has shown again the grasp of detail that impressed voters in 2017.

His approval rating has returned to the level it was at before the yellow vest

President's approval ratings



revolt — about 35 per cent. Support among moderate conservative voters has leapt 18 points, in a sign of agreement with his tough response to the street violence. Along with his €10 billion package of benefits and tax cuts, his performance in the debates “gives the impression that he’s back in the game,

and is coming over as a protection against instability”, Frédéric Dabi, deputy director-general of Ifop polling, said.

Support for the revolt has fallen from more than 70 per cent in November to under half. Turnout on Saturday at rallies around the country dipped below 50,000, from 275,000 at the outset, and many of those that remain are a radical core, given to violence, tainted by anti-semitism and devoted to conspiracy theories. They have alienated many backers of what began as a fuel tax revolt.

Much depends on how Mr Macron winds up his consultation next month. Hundreds of thousands of people have turned up to some 7,000 sessions in village halls, municipal gymnasiums and schools to offer their ideas for reform. Mayors of 10,000 towns and villages are sending the government the contents of “grievance books” that citizens have filled with their complaints and proposals since January. An online questionnaire

has drawn 700,000 contributions. The organisers will use artificial intelligence to produce a “synthesis” for a final round of regional debates and a short-list of propositions to Mr Macron.

The demands from the online exercise are topped by more social justice, fairer taxation, more democracy, better public services and greener state policies.

Mr Macron is contemplating a multiple choice referendum on some issues, such as reducing the size of parliament, but he has ruled out demands for restoring a wealth tax that he scrapped and for Swiss-style referendums to determine national policies.

He says he is determined to press on with the overhaul of the state-heavy system. His next goal is to reform pensions and streamline state benefits. A spring has returned to Mr Macron's step but the old cockiness has gone, for the time being at least. “I know I’m on thin ice,” he told reporters.

Young mafias want a slice of pizzerias' tourist riches

Italy

Tom Kington Rome

Shots have been fired at one of the most famous pizzerias in Naples as a new generation of mafia clans seek a portion of the money spent by thousands of tourists in the city.

Four shots were fired at Di Matteo in central Naples after it closed on Sunday night. Six weeks earlier there was a bomb attack on Sorbillo, a renowned pizzeria near by, and in January Terra Mia, a restaurant, was shot at.

“The historic centre of Naples is in the hands of criminal bands — the Camorra mafia is once again challenging the state,” Giampiero Perrella, head of the borough council, said.

Tourism in the area has risen 91 per cent since 2010, partly prompted by Elena Ferrante's novels about the city, which were a global hit and have been turned into a successful TV series. Lines of tourists outside Di Matteo and Sorbillo are common.

Some locals report that street crime is down as young jobless men find work in bars and hotels, but the attacks on the restaurants have been attributed to emerging mafia groups fighting for control of the money flowing into the neighbourhood. Following the arrest of many older Camorra bosses, teenage clans are terrorising neighbourhoods by racing down streets on mopeds, firing pistols in the air.

Gino Sorbillo, owner of the Sorbillo pizzeria, said: “By day there is a population of shopkeepers, students and young tourists who live cleanly, then there is the population which emerges at night to intimidate businesses.”

Mafia gangs often attack businesses if the owners refuse to pay them protection money, but Mr Sorbillo and Salvatore Di Matteo, owner of Di Matteo, denied being approached for payment.

The clans could not have targeted a better symbol of Naples. Di Matteo specialises in folded and fried pizzas — typically stuffed with ricotta, provola cheese and ciccioli, a local pancetta. Rarely seen outside Naples, the variant is considered by many in the city to be the true pizza. “Whoever touches the Di Matteo pizzeria touches a piece of Naples history,” Mr Di Matteo said.



Baby steps Tonja keeps a close eye on her unnamed cub at Tierpark in Berlin, where the polar bear gave birth in December

Shakira in tax trouble over haircuts

Spain

Graham Keeley Madrid

The pop singer Shakira has been summoned to appear in a Spanish court over allegations that she avoided paying about €14.5 million in tax.

The authorities claim that the Colombian musician should have paid tax on her global earnings between 2012 and 2014 because she was living in Spain full-time, having begun a relationship with the Barcelona footballer Gerard Piqué.

Shakira, 42, faces six charges of fraud but denies wrongdoing. She has told prosecutors she was living in the Bahamas during that period and did not become a tax resident in Barcelona —

where she still lives with Piqué, 32, and their two sons — until 2015.

Prosecutors investigated receipts from a hairdresser in Barcelona

where it is alleged Shakira, right, was a frequent customer during the disputed period. A person becomes a tax resident in Spain if they live in the country for 183 days of any year. Her representatives insist that until 2014 she earned most of her money on international tours and spent more than six months a year abroad.

Tax inspectors have visited the hairdresser, Jordi Ripoll — where the average cost of a haircut and combing is

€100 — and trawled through Shakira's social media accounts to try to show

that she was in Spain for most of the year and only travelled abroad sporadically. The authorities began investigating her in January last year. According to *El Periódico*, she has already paid the €14.5 million but has been unable to keep the case out of court. She will appear for questioning on June 12.

The former Manchester United manager José Mourinho was given a one-year suspended prison sentence and a €2.2 million fine this month after admitting tax fraud while he was the manager of Real Madrid.



AfD drawing support from regions that backed Hitler

Germany

Oliver Moody Berlin

The insurgent Alternative for Germany party is drawing from areas that were Nazi strongholds in the early 1930s, a study has found.

The AfD is “reactivating” ancient antipathies towards foreigners and mainstream politicians that had lain dormant in parts of the country, researchers claim.

These areas are concentrated in the former East Germany but are also scattered across southwestern states such as Hesse, Baden-Württemberg and Rhineland-Palatinate.

The AfD was founded in 2013 to oppose the Greek bailout and urge a more fiscally conservative course. After it failed to secure any seats in that year's general election, it swung sharply towards nationalist and anti-migrant policies under new leadership.

In 2017 it won 12.6 per cent of the vote to make it the largest opposition party, with 94 of the 709 Bundestag seats.

Daive Cantoni, Mark Westcott and Felix Hagemeyer at Ludwig Maximilian University in Munich found that the legacy of the Nazi party seemed to be a more significant factor than migration, globalisation and industrial decline, which are usually associated with the AfD's rise.

The party is doing well in seats that voted for Hitler in 1933 and then survived the rest of the 20th century relatively unchanged, such as towns and villages in the rural southwest.

The relationship between the Nazi and AfD voters held true even after the researchers adjusted their data to remove factors such as local unemployment or the number of refugees.

Strikingly, a common factor between the 1930s and 2017 was not antisemitism but rather the survival of scepticism towards foreigners, centrist politicians and strangers in general. “The denazification of the postwar era, and in general Germany's way of dealing critically with its past, are exemplary,” Professor Cantoni said. “But despite this ... some families or communities may preserve a more conservative outlook on the world: fearful of outsiders, nationalist, protectionist.”