Nicolas Sarkozy Sworn in as President of France

France's Fifth Republic announced the results of its presidential election May 6. Former minister of the Interior Nicolas Sarkozy was elected Président de la République following the second round of a run-off election between Mr. Sarkozy and Segolène Royal. Mr. Sarkozy of the Union pour un Mouvement Populaire, France's center-right political party, received 53.06% of votes, while Ms. Royal of the Parti Socialiste received 46.94%, according to figures from the Interior Ministry validated by the Conseil Constitutionnel.

The campaign season in France began February 22 when the Journal Officiel de la République Française published a decree convoking the election. On March 19, the Constitutional Council announced a list of 12 official candidates. The first round of voting took place April 22 and 83.77% of registered voters in France participated. Of the 12 candidates who presented themselves in the first round, the two who received the highest percentage of votes were eligible to move on to the second round: Nicolas Sarkozy, who received 31.18% of the vote, and Segolène Royal, who received 25.87%. During the latter round, which took place May 6, 83.97% of France's 44.5 million registered voters participated in the election, representing an increase of four percentage points from the 2002 election.

"Since I was very young I have felt an indescribable pride by belonging to a great, old and beautiful nation: France," Mr. Sarkozy declared upon the announcement of his victory. "I love France as one loves someone dear who has given everything to me. Now, it is my turn to give to France what France has given to me." Mr. Sarkozy was accompanied at his acceptance speech by two of his sons and two stepdaughters, after which a celebration took place outside at the Place de la Concorde attended by over 30,000 persons.

In his acceptance speech Mr. Sarkozy also underlined the importance of maintaining strong transatlantic ties between France and the United States. "I want to reach out to our American friends to tell them they can count on our friendship, which was forged in the tragedies of history that we have shared together," said Mr. Sarkozy.

The new president-elect finished his address by underlining France's commitment to human rights and democratic values. "I want to issue a call to everyone in the world who believes in the values of tolerance, freedom, democracy and humanism..." he declared, "to tell them that France will be at their side, that they can count on us."

On the other side of the Atlantic, U.S. President George Bush congratulated Mr. Sarkozy on his victory and said the friendship between the U.S. and France would continue, according to White House spokesman Gordon Johndroe, the press secretary for the National Security Council.

On May 16, president-elect Sarkozy replaced Jacques Chirac, who held the position of Président de la République since 1995. During an official ceremony at the Élysée Palace, the seat of the French presidency, Mr. Sarkozy signed an oath of office, after which he was officially inaugurated as the Président de la République. During the Ceremony, President Sarkozy delivered a speech and was bestowed with several military honors, accompanied by the "Marseillaise," the French national anthem, followed by a 21-gun salute. High-level officials, including the prime minister, the presidents of the French National Assembly and Senate, and members of the diplomatic corps, among others, attended.
French and American Joint Military Training on Land and at Sea

French and American military forces participated in a series of joint training exercises in March and April. Forty French soldiers of the 3rd Marine Infantry Regiment headquartered in Vannes, France, trained alongside U.S. Marines of the 1st Battalion/8th Regiment on American soil in areas of urban combat, fire, and convoy escort. Arriving March 17 at Camp Lejeune, South Carolina, the French unit joined the training camp at Fort Pickett, Virginia, for a two-week series of joint training exercises. The soldiers were divided into four groups, one for each of the battalion’s four companies.

Representatives of the Military Mission at the Embassy of France in Washington along with a team of French television journalists visited the soldiers during the exercises, at which time Lieutenant Colonel Gros, the current French Assistant Military Attaché, presented France’s National Defense Medal to an American captain who had previously served in Haiti.

In addition to this two-week joint training venture, the French and U.S. navies participated in a series of “touch and go” operations between April 15 and May 15 in the Indian Ocean involving air missions in support of U.S. and ISAF forces in Afghanistan. From each navy performed cross-decking of the other’s aircraft carrier. One F-18 performed a “touch and go” on the deck of French nuclear aircraft carrier Charles-de-Gaulle while a French Rafale repeated the same exercise on the deck of the U.S. aircraft carrier “Stennis.” While these exercises were designed to enhance the interoperability between the carrier groups of both navies, they demonstrate the mastery of complex procedures, as well as the trust developed between pilots and sailors of the two nations.

Europe on the Potomac

Go to Europe for Free? It almost sounds like an Internet scam, but on Saturday, May 12, Twenty-three European Member embassies in Washington, DC as well as the Washington Delegation of the European Commission, opened their premises to the public for a day-long open house in celebration of 50th anniversary of the European Union. From 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m., visitors were able to travel from France to Germany, Sweden and Romania, all in the course of one day—no passport needed—as part of the “Take Metro to Europe” program. Co-sponsored by the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority, the one-day function featured a free shuttle service to all participating embassies, providing guests with an opportunity to experience first hand the diversity of the European Union and its member states. Over 4,000 persons visited the Embassy of France alone.

“Take Metro to Europe” offered a colorful program in celebration of the signing of the Treaty of Rome in 1957, which launched the process of European integration. Participants were able to get a rare “behind-the-gates” look at the European embassies, many of which are among Washington’s historic and architectural highlights. The open house was designed to put both the diversity of Europe and the unity of Europe on display, as well as to stress the importance of transatlantic relations. “Sixty years ago, following two terrible World Wars that began in Europe, a handful of visionaries decided to combine forces to create a new, peaceful, prosperous, democratic and united Europe. Among the founding fathers of what would become the European Union were two exceptional Frenchmen: Jean Monnet and Robert Schuman,” said French Ambassador to the U.S., Jean-David Levitte. “Thus it is only natural for France to enthusiastically join in the celebration of Europe in Washington. I am delighted to open the doors of the French Embassy to the general public: so that together we may fête France, Europe and our friendship with the United States. I hope that all members of the family could enjoy. Many native Washingtonians commented that this was their first opportunity to visit these embassies, even though they might have lived next to them their whole lives. For others, it was the first time experiencing anything that related to that respective country. "This is a wonderful opportunity for me to get a sneak-peak at the country before I go there for the first time ever," remarked an enthusiastic visitor to the French Embassy. "There are several countries I’ve always wanted to visit ever since I studied abroad 30 some years ago, but never got a chance to. This [open house] is a great way to study up ahead of time so that I can fully appreciate the experience when I get there." Although the gates of the embassies may have closed at the conclusion of the open house, the spirit of transatlantic friendship between the European Union member states and the United States will continue to remain as open as ever.
French Cuisine Tickles International Critics’ Palettes

The London-based Restaurant magazine announced April 23 the release of the 2007 "S.Pellegrino World’s 50 Best Restaurant" list. The international list of the world’s best restaurants paid homage to a dozen French restaurants, over half of which advanced into the top 25.

Although the highly sought after title of World’s Best Restaurant went to Ferran Adria’s "El Bulli" in northern Spain, France boasted the largest number of restaurants on the list, beating four French restaurants, and New York, claiming four restaurants on the list, followed closely behind.

Now in its sixth year, the world’s best list was first published in 2002 by Restaurant magazine. It is compiled by a group of prominent food writers, critics, publishers and commentators from around the world.

For more information about the contest, including a complete list of winners, please visit www.theworld50best.com.

30th Birthday Celebration in the "Airs" for the Centre Pompidou

The Centre Pompidou is celebrating its 30th anniversary with "Airs de Paris," a vast plastic-arts, design and architecture exhibition exploring transformations in today’s cities and in city life. The exhibition, named after the oeuvre by Marcel Duchamp which marked the opening of the Centre in 1977, is divided into two volets (sections) of 73 artists, designers and architects. It treats Paris as a point of convergence, where the exhibited artists may have lived or worked. The event runs from April 25 to August 15 and presents the greatest artistic works from the 1970s to today.

The first volet of the exhibition features such artists as Duchamp, Gordon Matta-Clark, Jean-Luc Mouline, and Dominique Gonzalez-Foerster. Organized into ten themes, the art featured in this section examines topics such as technological, economic and social changes in the city and explores the place of the individual in the urban space. The second section pays homage to architecture, design, urbanism and the countryside. Divided into four chapters, this volet offers a glimpse of the imagined city, of today and tomorrow. With the works of Campement Urbain, Gilles Clément and Didier Faustin, this part of the show is sure to delight.

Podcasts, performances, online forums and conferences will also be a part of this magnificent exhibition. For more information, please visit www.centrepompidou.fr.

Plans for New Music Hall Crescendo in Paris

Chicag Welcome Béatrice et Bébéduct in the Park

Philharmonie de Paris, an eye-catching concert hall to be built in northeast Paris in Le Parc de la Vilette. The opening is set for 2012.

The Philharmonie, an estimated $260 million state of the art music facility, will include a 2,400-seat auditorium that will allow audience members to sit on all sides of the orchestra, including the area behind it, in what experts call a "vineyard" style on a series of multilevel terraces. In computer generated models, the Philharmonie resembles a mound of loosely stacked plates topped by a 170-foot-high sail.

The construction of the Philharmonie will serve the needs of L’Orchestre de Paris, which will have its base there, as well as a variety of international performers, allowing Paris to take its place among the major symphonic capitals of the world. Jean Nouvel is a highly respected architect in France as well abroad, having also designed Paris’s Institut du Monde Arabe and the recently opened Musée du Quai Branly, in addition to the new Guthrie Theater in Minneapolis, which opened last year.

It was music to the ears of orchestra members and concert-goers when French Minister of Culture and Communication Renaud Donnedieu de Vabres and Mayor of Paris Bertrand Delanoé announced April 5 plans to build Paris’s new music venue. Renowned architect Jean Nouvel was chosen to create the new City of Lights the city with the most top 50 restaurants. The cities of London, with six restaurants, and New York, claiming four restaurants on the list, followed closely behind.

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Barbie’s Thousand and One Lives

A new temporary exhibition at the Musée de la Poupée-Paris features 200 Barbie dolls and a collection of decorated sets equipped with furniture and accessories, until the end of September. With the cooperation of Mattel France, "Barbie’s Thousand and One Lives" presents the iconic doll in her many vocations and activities throughout history. Barbie has been enchanting the lives of children in the United States since 1959, and in France since 1963. An estimated 4.6 million Barbies are sold in France every year, and over one billion dolls have been sold since her creation. Reaching nearly four generations of women, Barbie has always reflected current trends and has become an international pop culture icon. She may be best known as an elegant movie star or a beauticious princess, but over the decades, she has appeared in more than 90 different roles, including an airfare pilot, ballerina, university graduate, Olympic athlete and even UNICEF ambassador. The Musée de la Poupée-Paris offers hands-on children’s programs in addition to the main exhibition. A fashion workshop will give kids the opportunity to create their very own Barbie doll dresses. Young imaginations can also compete in the "Draw a New Occupation for Barbie" contest. For more information please visit: www.museeaparopoupeesaris.com.

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Le Centre Pompidou is hosting "Airs de Paris"

© M.A.E. Photo: C. Bell

Digital image of the interior of the future concert hall

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Barbie doll dress-up workshop will give kids the opportunity to create their very own Barbie doll dresses. Young imaginations can also compete in the "Draw a New Occupation for Barbie" contest. For more information please visit: www.museeaparopoupeesaris.com.

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Digital image of the interior of the future concert hall

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Louisiana Film Festival Celebrates Cajun and Creole Cultural Heritage

The 2nd Annual Cinema on the Bayou Film Festival celebrating Cajun and Creole cultural heritage will take place May 23 to May 27 in Lafayette, Louisiana. The festival will present a series of nationally and internationally acclaimed documentaries from a diverse group of filmmakers. Through film screenings and film panels, organizers hope to promote cultural exchanges between French Louisiana, the United States and other Francophone countries.

This year the Cinema will feature new and cutting-edge fiction and non-fiction films, alongside documentaries, all the while surrounded by Cajun culture, including cuisine and music. "Little Chenier," the award-winning film about two brothers who live on a houseboat in the Bayou, will open the festival May 23. This year's festival will also showcase numerous French language films, including Jean-Pierre Brunet's "Dedans le Sud de la Louisiane," Andre Gladu's "Tintamarre, La piste Acadie en Amerique," Marc Andre Forcier's "Les Etats-Unis d'Albert" and Veronique Denis' "Boscoyo."

After an extremely successful turnout last year, which included four sold-out auditoriums and 40 some film screenings, the Cinema on the Bayou hopes for even greater success this year. The festival is funded in part by The Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and the Acadiana Arts Council Decentralized Arts Funding Program. For more information about venues and the festival, please visit: www.cinemaonthebayou.com.

Minneapolis Exhibition Explores Life at the French Court

The glitter and splendor of Versailles will be the subject of a new print exhibition at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. "L'Ancien Régime: Life at the French Court in the 17th and 18th Centuries," will run from June 30 to December 9 and includes a collection of prints drawn from the permanent collection that capture the romanticism of the Ancien Régime, or "Old Regime," as post-Revolutionary France termed the former system of aristocratic rule.

Printmakers such as Charles Nicolas Cochin II, Jean-Michel Moreau and Jean Le Pautre were commissioned by the kings of France to commemorate the ongoing court celebrations and to propagate, both at home and abroad, the grandeur of the French court and aristocracy. Ironically, these widely disseminated images of frivolity and decadence may have contributed to mounting tensions against the royal regime, helping to perhaps insight France's revolution at the end of the 18th century.

The estimated 1,000 courtiers who kept rooms at Versailles spent their time attending a dizzying schedule of amusements each season, including legendary events such as masquerade balls, concerts, theater performances, and fireworks displays. The Menus Plaisirs du Roi, the official bureaucratic department of the king's household responsible for overseeing the entertainment, employed a small army of artists, craftsmen, architects and printmakers to execute and record the elaborate events for which no expense was spared.

For more information about the exhibition, please visit: www.arts Mia.org.