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*Daily press in France and related issues*

**Introduction**

The press market in France, similarly to other countries has, for some time, been experiencing a crisis. The popularization of electronic media has resulted in less people reading the printed press. It seems that dailies and journals are losing their significance, although we cannot diminish the role of printed press in shaping public opinion. In this sphere this medium still fulfills its function.

The printed press market is very rich in France. There is a great diversity of offer, including newspapers and magazines, comparable to that in Great Britain and Germany. France is among Europe's leaders and trend setters in this field. In contrast to television<sup>1</sup>, the French press can serve as an example for other countries.

The great variety and the strong opinion shaping character of French press does not mean that this market is free of problems. It has not avoided the existing crisis which has affected its stability. The launching and disappearing of newspapers is visible, especially in the segment of national daily press which will be the focus of this article.

2007 was a particular year for French press. The socio-political situation at the time created so much reader interest that there observed was an increase in circulation numbers of national scope daily press. As a result, many papers have bettered their financial situation. Unfortunately, this period did not last long. In early 2008, the situation was back to that from before. The article will analyse the reasons for the temporary increase in daily press readership. All in all, it seems that the down trend is rather permanent in France and 2007 was just a short term exception.

Despite continuous changes taking place, there are several papers which have been on the market in France for a long time. These are major dailies with large circulation, considered influential regarding the shaping of public opinion. What is characteristic of this market is the general inexistence of tabloid press targeted at the mass audience. France, this way, differs from its closest neighbours such as Great Britain or Germany, although there are some papers which partly

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<sup>1</sup>The French television market is considerably slower regarding the implementation on new trends than other countries in Western Europe, such as Germany or France. One example is the digitalization process which will be completed in France by 2010 while in other countries it is much more advanced.

play that function such as “France-Soir” or “Le Parisien”. This is interesting since French press has been, up until the onset of World War II, dominated by popular press. In modern day France, popular press has got much lower circulation numbers than in other countries. This is partly due to legislation which in France strictly regulates the protection of personal rights. There is also other regulation which limits the publishing of sensational information. The French believe that it is not in their character to invade the personal lives and intimacy of famous people. However, lately what can be observed is increased interest in the private matters of celebrities and it might mean a change of the French character<sup>2</sup>.

Popular press in France differs from that in other countries not just in terms of circulation figures. The subject matter is different as well. The French are less likely to discuss the private lives of famous people and more likely to devote more space to sport and entertainment. It seems that the fact that there is less interest in popular press is not just characteristic of French press but it is also something the French are proud of as it is often mentioned in publications on media in that country<sup>3</sup>.

There have always been problems on the daily press market, however, they only got worse with time. The first mentions of a crisis date back to early 1980s when the major papers began experiencing financial difficulties. At that time, the only national papers which made profits were “Le Figaro” and “Les Echos” while many others went bankrupt, including popular papers such as “Le Paris Jour” (1972) and “L’Aurore” (1980). Even though, since then many changes have taken place, the economic crisis still persists. Every year brings changes, especially on the daily press market. Although not every year means lower circulation figures, it cannot be said that the crisis is over.

### **Reasons for crisis on the daily press market**

Researchers of French daily press list several reasons for the current situation. One of them, taking place not just in France, is the competition with the audiovisual media<sup>4</sup>. TV and radio offer people a simpler way of reception which requires less concentration. In response, national dailies have made attempts to make their articles more accessible and attractive to readers. They have started to use color, include more photographs and created electronic versions of their papers. New magazines were launched, very popular in France, which devote much more space to photos than newspapers. Among the best of these are socio-political journals (i.e. “Le Point”) and illustrated magazines (i.e. “Paris-Match”). The biggest threat to daily press is considered to be decreasing profits from advertising. Advertisers prefer audiovisual media because they can reach

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<sup>2</sup> Sarkozy’s campaign and the first year of his presidency have shown that the media are interested in the private lives of famous people. It should also be noted the Sarkozy used his private life to create his image. This was automatically used by French media, including the most prestigious.

<sup>3</sup> See F. Balle, *Médias et société*, Paris 2005; M. Thibault, *Comprendre les médias*, Paris 2005.

<sup>4</sup> Cf. K. Williams, *Media w Europie*, Warszawa 2008, p. 47.

their target groups more easily this way. The printed press is making efforts to increase its attractiveness to advertisers by broadening its recipient groups and including those who are not considered their target<sup>5</sup>. All in all, however, profits from advertising for national dailies are gradually decreasing. In 1999, it was 7.4% while five years later – only 5%. This was the largest noted decrease on the entire press market<sup>6</sup>.

Secondly, another reason for the crisis are the dailies' high prices<sup>7</sup>. The cost of one newspaper in France is much higher than in other European countries or in the US<sup>8</sup>. The prices of dailies increased rather quickly, especially between 1970–1980, when one copy cost eight times more than earlier<sup>9</sup>. In the past, the cost of one newspaper was comparable to that for a postage stamp, however that quickly changed after dramatic price increases, taking place since 1960. This was a hit for many publishers as price increases resulted in decreasing number of copies sold as a result of which some publishers had to declare bankruptcy. According to researchers, though, the situation has stabilized in 2004 when observed could be, together with increasing prices – better quality of the press. For example, when “Le Monde” increased its price in 1997, greater was also the number of its copies sold. Generally, there are two reasons for increasing prices of the press. One is the high cost of paper, not just a problem in France but also in other countries. The paper situation is dependent on the trends on the global market which influence everyone. For instance, between December 2000 and January 2001, the price of paper increased by 21.4%<sup>10</sup>. The other factor influencing prices in France is distribution costs. For example, the price of “Le Monde” in 2004 was 1.20 euro, of which 40 cents were distribution costs<sup>11</sup>. Press distribution market has also been experiencing a crisis for the last several years. Presently, there are plans to reform the distribution system, which would include an increase in the number of newspaper stands and minimize the costs of transport. The decreasing number of newspaper stands is often cited as a key reason for decreasing sales of dailies. In 1952, there were 40 000 stands while in 2003 – only 28 000<sup>12</sup>. What is necessary is the restructuring of Les Nouvelles Messageries de la Presse Parisienne (NMPP), a company which has basically monopolized the press distribution market.

The third reason for the crisis, first noticed and felt in mid 1990s, was the popularization of the Internet. At that time, many dailies created their own websites where people could read the dailies at no cost. With time, newspaper owners changed their attitude to the Internet. It turned out

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<sup>5</sup> Publishers, mainly American, but also French try to increase the size of advertisers' target groups by providing adverts via other channels as well (through mail advertising). This way they can reach those who do not read a given paper. See: B. Golka, *System medialny Stanów Zjednoczonych*, Warszawa 2004.

<sup>6</sup> F. Balle, *Médias...*, p. 74.

<sup>7</sup> In France, Parisian dailies are those which are national since their head offices are located in Paris.

<sup>8</sup> The average price in France is over 1 euro, in Italy – 0.90 euro, in Germany – 0.52 euro, in Britain and Japan – 0.44 euro, in the US – 0.36 euro. See F. Balle, *Médias...*, p. 74.

<sup>9</sup> Ibidem, p. 73.

<sup>10</sup> Ibidem, p. 74.

<sup>11</sup> Ibidem.

<sup>12</sup> [www.esj-lille.fr/spip.php?article268](http://www.esj-lille.fr/spip.php?article268) [ : 21.10.2008]. All Internet sources were accessed on October 21, 2008.

that advertisers were not very keen on including advertisements in online versions of the papers as a result of which the offer had to be partly for a fee. Every national French daily has got its own website, however, only parts of each daily's issue are offered online free of charge. The Internet has proved to be extremely influential and it largely took away readers from dailies. Internet portals, with their broad media offer are more attractive than plain printed press and they have not aided in its popularization. Today, many publishers attempt to differentiate their online offer from the printed one in order to increase their recipient and advertisers base.

There is another reason which researchers indicate as responsible for decreasing interest in printed press. Perhaps it is the fact that many people's socio-economic status has improved and they are looking for entertainment elsewhere<sup>13</sup>. Kevin Williams states, "Growing secularization of societies has weakened ideological, religious and political reasons for which people used to read newspapers. In early XX century, newspapers were a tool in the hands of various institutions, they were financed and supported by political parties, the Church, trade unions and country communities. The erosion of group identity and the popularization of individualism have negatively influenced newspaper readership"<sup>14</sup>.

The final reason for the crisis is free of charge press. This idea originated in Sweden and quickly gained supporters around Europe. Free of charge press is usually given out in public transport means in large cities. In France, the papers are distributed in the metro and the RER railway. The readers are able to look through and find out about current events on their way to work (20 minutes on average). This type of press is similar to tabloid; it includes short articles, many pictures and colour while content focuses on entertainment and practical information. The criticism of free dailies is that they do not respect the rules of the profession<sup>15</sup>. The accusations are that the texts are succinct and there is a general lack of journalist diligence. Proponents of free press answer that in this competition the stake is not press quality but profits from advertising. In contrast to regular papers, free press is entirely dependent on advertising. Ever since the first two free dailies were launched in France in 2002, "Metro" and "20 minutes", profits from advertising in regular newspapers gradually started decreasing.

"Metro" is published by the media group, Metro International, originating from Sweden while "20 minutes" is owned by the Norwegian Schibsted. Both dailies also have local editions and are distributed in large cities. In 2007, "Metro" circulation was 740 382 and "20 minutes" – 715 981 (cf. Table 1)<sup>16</sup>. It should also be noted that there are other dailies with a minor share of the market.

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<sup>13</sup> K. Williams, *Media...*, p. 47.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibidem*, p. 47–48.

<sup>15</sup> M. Thibault, *Comprendre...*, p. 19.

<sup>16</sup> The circulation data comes from the OJD report from 2007 published on the OJD website, L'office de justification de la diffusion, an organization established in 1922. It is one of France's oldest institutions in charge of circulation. In 2007, it was responsible for 1393 newspapers.

**Table 1. Circulation figures of free of charge dailies in different cities in 2007.**

Daily	Circulation
“20 minutes” (Paris)	427 162
“Metro Paris”	415 597
“20 minutes (Lyon)	69 541
“20 minutes” (Lille)	62 558
“Metro Rhone-Alpes”	62 556
“20 minutes” (Marseille)	56 315
“Metro Marseille-Region”	55 596
“Metro Lille”	45 275
“Metro Toulouse”	36 214
“Metro Ouest Nantes-Rennes”	32 747
“20 minutes” (Toulouse)	30 099
“20 minutes” (Nantes)	29 035
“Metro Cote d’Azur”	28 065
“20 minutes” (Bordeaux)	27 251
“Metro Bordeaux”	26 192
“20 minutes” (Strasbourg)	25 586
“Metro Strasbourg”	15 572

Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe\\_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1864](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1864).

It needs to be mentioned that the role of free of charge dailies in shaping public opinion is growing. Firstly, since 2004, its circulation numbers have slightly increased, regardless of socio-political events taking place<sup>17</sup>. This is due to increasing readership of free press. In 2007 (specific year in France), it grew by 6% in comparison to the previous year while for regular press this percentage was less than 0.5%<sup>18</sup>.

The French daily press crisis also has other reasons such as the aging of the population. All in all, it can be said that the same problems, to a smaller or larger extent, are being experienced by other countries.

### **The most important national dailies**

In 2007, there were 16 national dailies published in France<sup>19</sup> as well as about 69 others coming out in different regions and departments<sup>20</sup>. National dailies focus on information and are considered to shape public opinion. As Bartłomiej Golka<sup>21</sup> noticed that regional press is generally in a stable financial position, there are several Parisian dailies which have national scope and are famous worldwide. They are characterized by high level, objective journalism. Some people claim that best journalist salaries are the reason for the dailies’ high prices, however, this is an unlikely

<sup>17</sup> [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=4205](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=4205); [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=4173](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=4173).

<sup>18</sup> [www.audipresse.fr/node.php?id=905&elementid=1527](http://www.audipresse.fr/node.php?id=905&elementid=1527).

<sup>19</sup> [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe\\_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1771&subcat=353](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1771&subcat=353).

<sup>20</sup> [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe\\_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1771&subcat=354](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1771&subcat=354).

<sup>21</sup> B. Golka, *System medialny Francji*, Warszawa 2001, p. 139.

scenario. Generally staff wages have a marginal influence on price which is largely dependent on other factors.

“**La Croix**” is one of the dailies (“**Le Figaro**” is the other) which has maintained a rather stable financial position throughout the crisis. It is one of the oldest Parisian newspapers, first launched in 1883. It is a Catholic daily, of national scope, of which 95% of readers are subscribers<sup>22</sup>. Subscription percentages are important to publishers as they provide financial stabilization. The newspaper, established by St. Mary’s Assumption congregation, is predominantly read by Catholics and senior citizens<sup>23</sup>. What is interesting is that a Catholic daily is so popular in increasingly secular France, experiencing a Catholicism crisis for some time. Meanwhile, the daily’s circulation between 2000–2004 has increased by 10% and in 2007 it enumerated 105 216 copies per issue. This progress is a result of internal reforms. Since January 1999, it comes out as a morning paper, thanks to which it has gained new readers. Moreover, its publisher, the Bayard Press group, has changed its profile to more tabloid style. What is more, these changes were not enforced due to financial difficulties. The company analysed its readers’ socio-demographic profile and opted to gain new, younger than 60 year old, readers.

“**Le Figaro**” is the oldest Parisian daily, established in 1854. The daily, similarly to other papers during World War II, did not come out between 1942 and 1944 in order to avoid collaboration accusations. After the war, it was managed by Pierre Brisson (until his death) and later it was bought by Jean Prouvost (who earlier owned part of its shares). In 1975, it was sold to Robert Hersant who helped to get it out of financial difficulties. During Hersant’s rule, launched was “**Le Figaro Magazine**” (1978) which today is a leading socio-political daily targeting intellectual elites. “**Le Figaro**” also bought out the failing daily “**L’Aurore**” and took over some of its readers as both papers were considered right wing. In reality, it was about taking over the competition. After Hersant’s death in 1996, a new stage began for “**Le Figaro**”. Businessman and former senator, Serge Dassault has, for some time, been interested in buying the daily, however, Hersant’s wife was against the idea. Also, the editors were against changes and probable commercialization in connection with a new owner. After Mrs. Hersant’s passing away and in view of the daily’s critical situation, 30% of the Socpress group (“**Le Figaro**’s” direct owner, part of the Hersant concern) shares were sold to Serge Dassault who, in 2004, became its major shareholder. Those who did not welcome the changes were right; in 2005 the daily changed its format to tabloid. It should be noted, though, that at that time it was a popular trend affecting many prestigious dailies, not just in France<sup>24</sup>. As far as content, major changes were not enforced, there was now less radicalism and more moderate political opinions as well as shorter articles and more photos. The

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<sup>22</sup> M. Thibault, *Comprendre...*, p. 28.

<sup>23</sup> Data on readers’ religious preferences is not available as this type of research is prohibited in France since 1978.

<sup>24</sup> In 2004, the British “**The Times**” changed its format and in 2005 – also “**Le Monde**”.

daily strengthened its position due to the new format and a supplement, launched in 2005, “Le Figaro et Vous”. The supplement focused on entertainment and made the entire daily more light reading. In order to distinguish it visually from other dailies, it was now printed on light blue paper. This did not result in the expected increase in readership. In 2005, its circulation was 342 445, in 2006 it decreased to 338 269 but 2007 was a better year as circulation increased by 6 000.

Another major daily shaping public opinion in France is “**Le Monde**”. It is not only popular in France but world wide. It was established in 1944 by Hubert Beuve-Mery and other journalists. For years, the paper has been considered to be the voice of French intellectuals, of centre-left wing character. Despite its popularity, “Le Monde” was also plagued by the crisis, additionally due to a controversial book, *La Face cache du Monde*, published in 2003, revealing the paper’s lack of objectivity and journalist unreliability<sup>25</sup>. Between 2002–2006 the daily’s circulation decreased from 416 774 to 355 017. In 2007, there was a slight increase, by 3000 copies, but in 2008 it decreased once again. In the 1990s, there was an ongoing fight for control of the paper. In 1995, the executives, contrary to earlier regulation, enforced capital changes. Prior to 2005, shares of the daily could only belong to people associated with it, later 45.9% was sold to outside groups. The continuing crises resulted in more and more of foreign capital inflow which threatened the daily’s independence. In 2005, 17% of shares were bought by Lagardère, and 15% – by Spanish Prisma (publisher of “El Pais”). In order to maintain control of the daily, “Le Monde” journalists reserved for themselves the right to veto decisions<sup>26</sup>. Thanks to it, probably, unwanted changes were avoided which could affect the relationship between the editorial office and the owners. It should be noted that “Le Monde” also changed its format but its modifications were not as drastic as in “Le Figaro”. In 2007, the paper’s long time chief, Jean-Marie Colombani, was not re-elected for the third time and he was replaced by Pierre Jeantet. After Colombani leaving, there has been mounting pressure by owners regarding the paper’s line. This might mean upcoming changes for the daily in the near future. Mentioned should also be the daily’s famous supplement, “Le Monde Diplomatique”, a monthly on international issues. It is not a very well known fact that since 1978 the supplement has got its own editorial office and the name is the only thing that the two have in common (plus part of the shares and similar views, although the monthly is more radical). “Le Monde Diplomatique” comes out in 30 countries and is translated into numerous languages, including Esperanto.

Another influential French daily of national scope and is “**Liberation**”. It was established, on April 18, 1973, by left wing journalists, Serge July, Philippe Gavi, Bernard Lallement and Jean-Claude Vernier. Later on, the famous French philosopher, Jean-Paul Sartre, joined the group and

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<sup>25</sup> P. Péan, Ph. Cohen, *La Face cachée du Monde*, Paris 2003.

<sup>26</sup> This is done in order to protect companies from hostile take overs by the competition or not to have unwelcome decisions enforced by the of majority shareholders.

became actively involved with the daily. Initially, the paper was to not to make use of advertising, however, as of May 1981, that changed. The daily's financial situation was not stable. In 1996, 66% of shares were sold to Pathé which, in 2000, shared them with British 3i. In 2005, "Liberation" was aided by Edouard de Rothschild, a French banker who bought 38.87% of shares and stabilized its financial situation. Just like "Le Monde", the daily's journalists reserved themselves the right to block unwanted decisions. The new shareholder pressed for change as "Liberation's" circulation was decreasing (in 2002 it was 166 275 and in 2006 – only 135 411). In 2006, one of the founders, July, decided to resign as he did not agree with the banker's proposal. This way, a new stage began for the daily which may determine its future existence. Research results from 2007 show that the paper's circulation as well as readership are stable<sup>27</sup>.

**"Aujourd'hui en France"** was established in 1994. It is the one of two Parisian dailies which has increased its circulation throughout the crisis. In comparison to "La Croix", which has experienced only a minute increase, "Aujourd'hui" is a true success. Between 2000–2004, its circulation enlarged by 18% and throughout the next several years its position on the market stabilized. In 2002, its circulation was 149 337, while in 2007 it was estimated at 191 637. It can be said the paper became successful after it adopted a new formula, so far inexistent on the French market. "Aujourd'hui en France" is a combination of tabloid press and an opinion forming daily. It is the national issue of the regional daily **"Le Parisien"**, a continuation of the tabloid "Le Parisien Libere". Many media experts in France believe that "Le Parisien" and "Aujourd'hui" are tabloids but they are at a much higher level than the German "Bild" or British "The Sun". The daily's character was shaped by its owners, the Amaury family. Emilien Amaury and later his son Philippe experimented various ways in order to give the daily its present shape. The articles are short with simple sentences and photos take up one third of the page. Both dailies discuss political issues but it is not the dominant subject. Most popular are investigative journalism articles. The Amaury family as a media group specializes in sport magazines, which is also visible in "Le Parisien" and "Aujourd'hui en France".

**"France-Soir"**, established in 1994, is "Aujourd'hui en France's" competitor. This daily is much more a tabloid than other national papers. Between 1999–2000 its circulation decreased by over 74%; in 2007 it dropped to 23 807 copies per issue. Such a large decline shows that these types of tabloid dailies are not very popular in this country. Today, its financial condition is grave and it can be said that the paper is close to bankruptcy. It can be said that some of its readers switched over to free press, which is similar in character. Its publisher is continuously looking for investors, also from abroad. Since 2004, it has had a new owner on average every 12 months, which was not advantageous. In 2006, it was bought by VME Patrimoine which has so far, other than replacing personnel, not done much else to help its situation.

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<sup>27</sup> [www.ojd.com/dyn/\\_files/books/151-Book-2007-Presses-Payante-GP.pdf](http://www.ojd.com/dyn/_files/books/151-Book-2007-Presses-Payante-GP.pdf).



In discussing French national press, two other papers need to be mentioned, of specific profiles; the economic “Les Echos” and sport – “L’Equipe”.

“**Les Echos**” was established in 1908 by the Servan-Schreiber families. Initially it was a monthly but later on, during the war period, it became a daily. In its history it has had three owners: the Servan-Schreiber families, the Beytout family and British Pearson. In 2007, the DI Group (media section of the holding specializing in luxury products, including the Louis Vuitton label) bought it from Pearson. “Les Echos” has a rather stable position on the market although in 2002 its circulation decreased slightly (by about 10 000). In 2007, its circulation was estimated to be 138 726 which places it as the market leader in this segment (“La Tribune”, second on the market, circulation 88 118). It needs to be mentioned that economic papers are read by a specific reader group, interested in information in the form of statistics and analyses. Such information can also be easily found on the Internet which is why economic papers have found themselves in a difficult financial situation over the last ten years<sup>28</sup>.

“**L’Equipe**”, the sport daily, was created in 1946. Just like “Le Parisien”, it belongs to the Amaury group. It has a rather stable position on the market, which is probably due to the great popularity of sport games in France<sup>29</sup>. The daily focuses on football and cycling but also on other sports such as tennis, rugby and golf. It has got quite a large circulation, in 2007 estimated at 336 929. It seems that advertisers prefer profiled press to regular, hence, it has not been affected as much as other dailies by the crisis.

### **Regional dailies**

According to data from 2007, gathered by OJD, it is estimated that there are 69 regional and departmental (meaning local) dailies in France. The financial situation of regional press is much better than that of national. On the French market, 80% of all sold dailies are regional papers<sup>30</sup>. This is so for several reasons. Generally, readers prefer regional and local press because they can find there information that is closer to them. National and international news can be obtained via television or the Internet. Moreover, regional and local television is not well developed in France, hence, more people turn to the press for local news.

Another reason for readers preferring regional press, and probably the most important one, is its price. The average cost of a national daily is over 1 euro, while a regional paper costs about 0.80 euro. This is a significant difference, not just for readers but also for publishers. This is because regional press is distributed over a much smaller area and also its quality of paper and print is often worse than that of national dailies.

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<sup>28</sup> M. Thibault, *Comprendre...*, p. 26.

<sup>29</sup> B. Golka, *System medialny Francji...*, p. 142.

<sup>30</sup> K. Williams, *Media...*, p. 44.

Additionally, the competition on the regional market is not comparable to that on the national. According to Thibault<sup>31</sup>, regional and local press often has a monopoly on the market. This is due to the narrow advertising market which is the press' predominant source of income. Moreover, there is limited readership. It often happens that it is not possible for two local dailies to remain on the same market. Therefore, demand and advertising are the two determinants of existence for this type of press.

The dominant daily on the regional press market is definitely “**Ouest-France**” which in 2007 has reached the circulation of 795 765 copies per issue, greater than any national daily. This paper, similarly to other regional ones, has got 14 different local editions. Each of these contains the same national and international information but different local news. Its editorial office employs as many as 550 journalists, of which half are local correspondents.

**Table 2. Regional newspapers with a circulation over 200 000 in 2007**

Daily	City	Year established	Average circulation in 2007
“Ouest-France”	Rennes	1944	795 765
“Le Parisien”	Paryż	1944	337 322
“Sud Ouest”	Bordeaux	1944	317 929
“La Voix du Nord”	Lille	1944	291 781
“Le Dauphiné Libéré”	Grenoble	1945	248 556
“Les Progrès”	Lyon	1859	228 410
“La Nouvelle République du Centre-Ouest”	Tours	1944	215 344
“Le Télégramme”	Brest	1944	208 664

Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe\\_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1771&subcat=354](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/adhe_list.php?mode=chif&cat=1771&subcat=354)

Lastly, it should be noted that the level of concentration in regional press in France is very high. It cannot be said that there is one regional or local daily which is fully independent. Increasingly, they are bought out by large media groups. Since 1945, there is a decreasing number of local papers since as many as 90 went bankrupt. Although local press is in a better condition than national, it is still experiencing a downturn. Perhaps greater concentration at the cost of losing independence is the only way to survive.

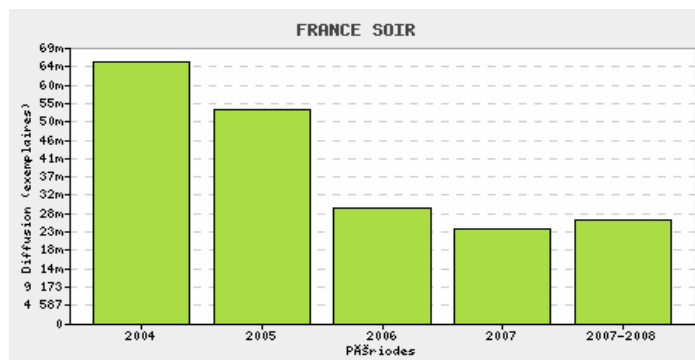
### National dailies in 2007

2007 was a specific year for French press. Despite an international press crisis, the majority of national dailies slightly increased or stabilized their circulation figures. There were, however, some papers whose numbers decreased such as the tabloid “France-Soir”. Its circulation

<sup>31</sup> M. Thibault, *Comprendre...*, p. 31.

has been gradually declining since 2004 (Chart 1) which can eventually lead to its disappearing from the market.

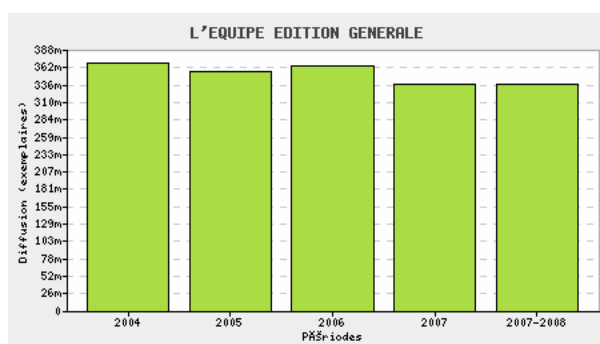
**Chart 1. “France-Soir” circulation**



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=371](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=371).

Another paper with dropping circulation in 2007 was the sport daily “L’Equipe”, down 1500 copies in comparison to previous year. It did not mean a financial crisis but definitely destabilization of its economic position. (cf. Chart 2)

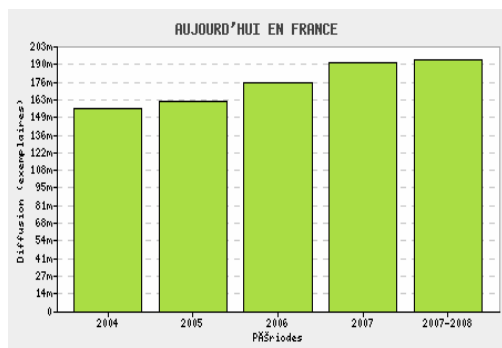
**Chart 2. “L’Equipe” circulation**



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=313](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=313).

Generally in 2007, with the exception of several papers, the majority of both regional and national dailies increased their circulation. Earlier such progress was only visible regarding regional papers, much less so as far as national ones and definitely not in the entire market segment. This was often a result of new policies adopted by editorial offices or due to a change of owner or graphic layout. In 2007, there were socio-political factors which influenced the entire daily market in France. It is interesting to compare the circulation in different years of the most important national dailies.

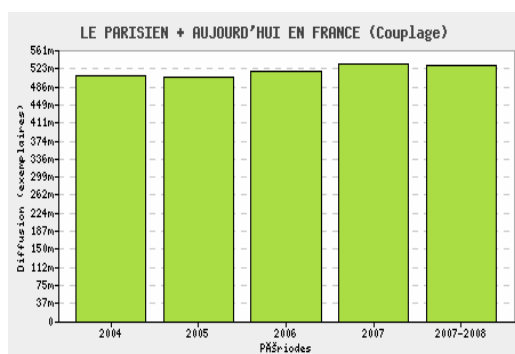
**Chart 3. “Aujourd’hui en France” circulation**



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=87](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=87).

The “Aujourd’hui en France” daily (Chart 3) significantly increased its circulation. In 2006, it was 175 456 while a year later – 191 637. “Le Parisien” was similar. If we included its national edition, it is estimated that their circulation grew by over 20 000 copies per issue (Chart 4).

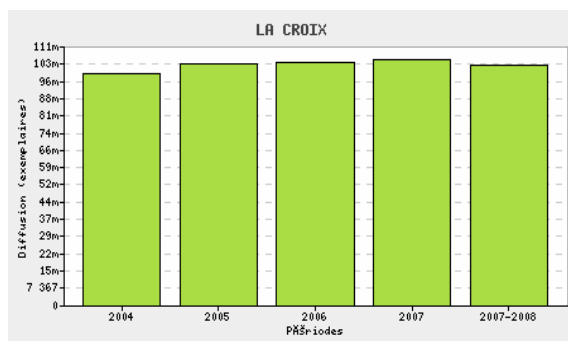
#### Chart 4. “Aujourd’hui en France” and “Le Parisien” circulation



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=719](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=719).

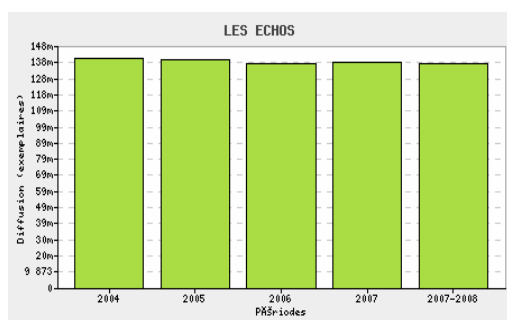
“La Croix” has, for years, enjoyed a stable position on the market, which can be seen in Chart 5. This is largely due to that fact that the daily is predominantly sold via subscription. Even so, this daily also recorded a slight rise in circulation in 2007, by about 2000 copies.

#### Chart 5. “La Croix” circulation



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=227](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=227).

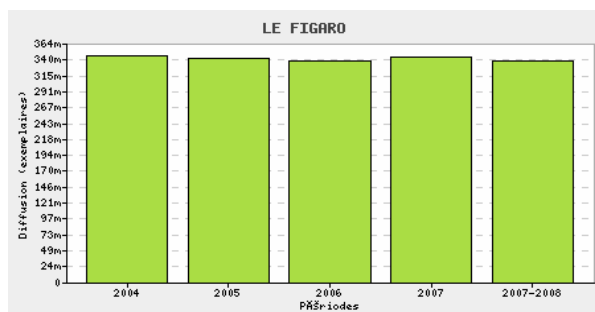
### Chart 6. “Les Echos” circulation



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=281](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=281).

“Les Echos”, one of the most important economic periodicals on the French market, has also, for some time, been stable on the market. This is due to its prestige as well as the fact that it possesses a constant group of loyal readers. This daily, as well, has enjoyed a slight increase in its circulation in 2007, by about 1500 copies.

### Chart 7. “Le Figaro” circulation

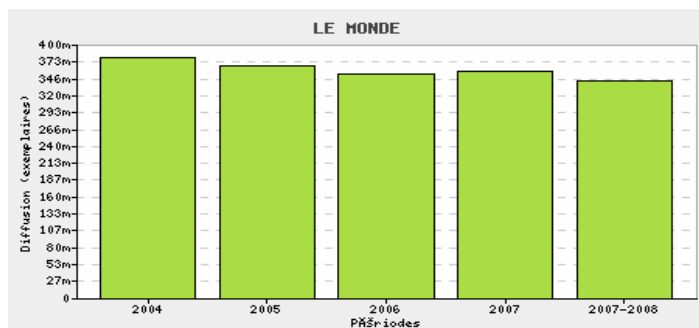


Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=353](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=353).

“Le Figaro”, one of the most famous Parisian dailies, has strengthened its position on the market as well. Since 2004, its circulation has been stable, mostly due to it being taken over by Serge Dassault, the owner of Socpress. Since then, the paper has gradually become more tabloid

like which gained it many new readers. In 2007, its circulation increased by 4000 copies per issue, perhaps due to factors other than in connection with editorial decisions.

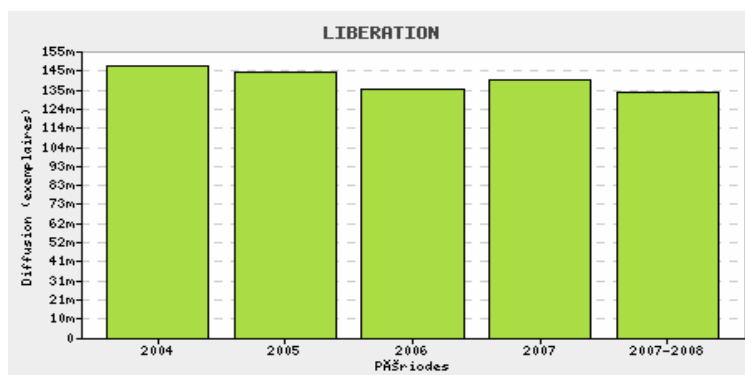
**Chart 8. “Le Monde” circulation**



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=625](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=625).

“Le Monde” similarly to its main competitor, “Le Figaro”, experienced a minor increase in its circulation. In 2006, it was 355 017 while a year later it was 358 655.

**Chart 9. “Libération” circulation**



Source: [www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif\\_fiche.php?adhid=526](http://www.ojd.com/engine/adhchif/chif_fiche.php?adhid=526).

The results achieved by “Liberation” over the last few years are somewhat paradoxical if we take into consideration what was going on in its head office. Multiple changes of owner and the resignation of long time chief resulted in numerous demurrage in the daily’s presence on the market. It would seem that such difficulties would hinder the paper’s position on the market, meanwhile in 2007 the daily increased its circulation by 4500 in comparison to the previous year.

In analysing the circulation of dailies in France, it is evident that 2007 was a specific year for French press. It should be noted that not only circulation figures rose but also readership. It would seem that an increase of 0.2% is not significant but it does mean change if we compare it to the decreases over the last several years. Up until 2006 French press was experiencing gradual

declines in readership (every year was worse than the one before). It was 2007 which allowed everyone to appreciate this part of the media market and this specific segment of printed press.

There were various factors which influenced the present situation. It is imperative to note that it was for the first time that a downturn, taking place since 1980s, was reversed. Previously no event over the last 30 years had been able to take the market out of recession. For example, the riots by immigrant populations which stormed the country in 2005 did create enough interest for people to buy more papers. It was two years later, in 2007, presidential election campaign and hopes in connection with a new leader that reversed this negative trend on the press market. The first part of 2008 was marked by a stabilization of readership but unfortunately the end of the year results indicated a slight decrease in comparison to the previous year. It seems that 2007 was just a short term positive change and not an indication of a new era for French print media.

The first factor which positively influenced circulation was the presidential election campaign and the election itself. At that time France was experiencing a political, economic and social crisis. Now, the French regained hope that a new president could change the existing situation. Hence, during the campaign there was increased demand for information about it. There was also greater interest in presidential debates which were never particularly influential in France. Imperative was also the fact that there taking place was a competition between a man and a woman, so it can be said that there were factors other than political that spurred people's interest.

Nicolas Sarkozy was the first presidential candidate who skillfully used the media in his election campaign, being aware of their power. The media did, in fact, play a key role in his campaign. He used them to show his and his family's private lives. This was something new on the French political scene as in the past the politicians' private lives were always kept out of the public eye. Meanwhile, Sarkozy showed himself in private situations which gained him popularity. Up until then, it was predominantly the intelligentsia who were interested in politics, now it was also the masses.

Influencing circulation figures were also other post-election events, in connection with the new president. This was pointed out by Francis Morel, the chairwoman of national publishers' association and "Le Figaro's" general director<sup>32</sup>. What occurred was massive tabloidisation of media content, especially regarding the private lives of famous people. After the car crash in which Princess Diana died, a series of legal and ethical modifications were enforced in this sphere. French law is very specific regarding the regulation of personal rights and freedoms. This, for time, largely limited tabloidisation, however, the changes which took place in 2007 were not initiated by media institutions but rather due to influential people's consent, who wanted to use them as a tool for self-promotion.

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<sup>32</sup> D. Le Goff, M. Signouret, *L'audience de la presse*, „Strategie” nr 1513, 18.09.2008.

The other factor which also influenced circulation in France was of both – political and social character. At that time the French society was increasingly concerned about opening its borders to workers from new EU member countries. So far, the job market was open only to some professions. With increasing unemployment due to immigrant inflow (not only from the EU but also from Africa) many people's financial security was threatened. France, being one of the most attractive countries for immigrants was experiencing a crisis due to incoming cheaper labour than domestic. In 2007, there was a heated debate on this issue, which was of great interest to the public. Interestingly, perhaps another reason as to why circulation numbers rose was because a percentage of incoming immigrants were French speakers.

Additionally, changed was the way in which readership was estimated. This time, aside from paper versions of dailies, measured was also on-line readership. Internet is a medium of increasing popularity, year after year. Probably, if only paper sales were calculated, there would not be noted an increase in readership. Modification of research techniques often results in changes in results obtained, that is why it is imperative to not only calculate circulation but also readership.

All in all, it is quite probable that the 2007 improvement on the national daily press market was only short term. When the socio-political situation in France stabilizes, the role of dailies will, most likely, continue to diminish. Great social crises will continue to be of interest to media, however, the expansion of image media will only negatively influence demand for printed press. It is a natural trend that there is growing marginalization of not just national dailies but printed press in general and not much can be done about it.

### **Regional dailies in 2007**

2007 was a specific year also for regional dailies in France. Numerous socio-political factors were more influential than the regularities normally ruling this market. One example is the fact that regional dailies lost ground to national ones. This tendency is generally the opposite, with the exception of 2007. The presidential election campaign and other events in connection with national politics resulted in more readers purchasing national press. As a result, the circulation of regional dailies decreased. In 2007, they were, on average, lower by 1500 copies<sup>33</sup>. In early 2008, the trend began to slowly reverse itself.

If there wasn't a crisis on the French press market, then perhaps the position of regional dailies would not have changed. The general problem with daily press is that it is expensive. For that reason, the French generally buy just one daily and due to the specific political situation at that time, they chose to purchase national dailies over regional. If French press was cheaper, then readers would probably buy more different papers.

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<sup>33</sup> Own observations based on a report on the circulation of regional dailies, [www.ojd.fr](http://www.ojd.fr).



### Conclusion

The press situation in France does not differ much from what is happening in other countries. The circulation of newspapers is decreasing worldwide. Suffering is also the sale of illustrated magazines, considered to be the most stable segment of the market. Since the 1960s, it has been said that printed press will one day cease to exist<sup>34</sup>. So far, however, this market is fighting crises and it continues to exist despite the forecasts. In countries such as Germany or France, the position of regional dailies seems stable. The printed media are considered to be opinion forming and this is perhaps the reason why they continue to maintain their position. This was particularly visible in France, in 2007, during presidential elections.

On the other hand, it is evident that the circulation of dailies in France and world wide is decreasing. There are a lot less people now who buy and read newspapers than there were 30 years ago<sup>35</sup>. Many French publishers attempt to gain new young readers, without much success. Especially the conservative dailies, such as “La Croix”, have great problems in obtaining new readers.

Moreover, there are economic factors which do not make the situation easier. The high price of paper or competition on the advertising market are examples of other problems which the publishers have to deal with in order to survive on the market.

The next few years will show in which direction the daily press market in France is heading. The specificity of the year 2007 will not have much influence on the position of dailies on the market. The present media trends around the world are visible also in France. There is a high probability that the down trend will continue for the traditionally prestigious Parisian dailies in the future. There are numerous efforts to save the position of daily press by both publishers and the government, however, these efforts will not amount to much if there aren't readers ready to purchase newspapers on a daily basis.

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<sup>34</sup> K. Schoenbach, E. Lauf, J. McLoed, D. Scheufele, *Distinction and Integration: Social-Demographic Determinations of Newspaper Reading in the USA and Germany, 1974–1996*, “European Journal of Communication” 1999, nr 14, p. 225–239; K. Williams, *Media...*, p. 43.

<sup>35</sup> K. Williams K., *Media...*, p. 46.