Beat: Arts

CATHERINE PEGARD FROM NEWSROOMS AND VERSAILLES TO SUCCEEDING RACHIDA DATI

AT THE HELM OF FRENCH HERITAGE

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USPA NEWS - Today also marks the one month anniversary of Catherine Pégard's appointment as France's Minister of Culture on 26 February, a symbolic moment to look back at her background and first steps at the Rue de Valois. Before entering government, Catherine Pegard built a long career in the media and at the heart of French institutions. She started out as a journalist at J'informe (1977–1978), then became a political reporter at Le Quotidien de Paris (1978–1982) before joining Le Point, where she successively served as reporter, special correspondent, deputy editor in chief and then editor in chief of the politics desk between 1982 and 2007. Catherine Pegard, then moved to the Elysee Palace as political adviser to President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2011), before being appointed president of the public establishment of the Château, Museum and National Estate of Versailles from 2011 to 2024, a position in which she was twice renewed. Over the years she sat on several strategic bodies, including the Foreign Action Steering Council at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the advisory board of the Cycle des hautes études de la culture and the Council of the Order of Arts and Letters.

This article is written by our accredited senior cultural correspondent and is based on information released by the French Ministry of Culture, the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs and other official cultural institutions. This is not a report on site, and it draws on her long standing expertise, data driven insights and intellectual intuition to put this new European framework for series co production into perspective, at a time when Catherine Pegard has just been appointed Minister of Culture, succeeding Rachida Dati, who left the government in February to focus on her campaign for the Paris mayoral election.

CATHERINE PEGARD, FROM POLITICAL REPORTER TO GUARDIAN OF FRENCH HERITAGE
Catherine Pegard, then moved to the Elysee Palace (French Presidency) as political adviser to President Nicolas Sarkozy (2007–2011), before being appointed president of the public establishment of the Château, Museum and National Estate of Versailles from 2011 to 2024, a position in which she was twice renewed. Over the years she sat on several strategic bodies, including the Foreign Action Steering Council at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, the advisory board of the Cycle des hautes études de la culture and the Council of the Order of Arts and Letters.
More recently, she served as director of cultural development and member of the executive committee at the French Agency for the Development of AlUla (AFALULA) in Saudi Arabia, then was tasked with a governmental mission on cultural sponsorship and corporate support for France's external action, before becoming special cultural adviser to the President of the Republic in 2025 and, finally, Minister of Culture in February 2026.

FORMER MINISTER RACHIDA DATI, AN ICONIC JUSTICE MINISTER AND MEDIA FIGURE
Rachida Dati first became a central figure in French politics in 2007, when Nicolas Sarkozy appointed her Minister of Justice, making her one of the most emblematic members of his first government and a highly visible symbol of social diversity at the top of the state. During her time at the Chancellerie, she carried a series of controversial criminal justice reforms that cemented both her authority and her polarising image, while her personal story and communication style quickly made her a favourite subject for the media.

Over the years, Dati capitalised on this notoriety to build a durable political base in Paris, eventually becoming mayor of the 7th arrondissement and a key right wing figure in the capital. When she was appointed Minister of Culture in early 2024, her arrival at the Rue de Valois was immediately read as a political signal: a combative, media savvy minister in charge of a sector that is both highly symbolic and structurally exposed to ideological battles. Her tenure was marked by strong statements on cultural "reconquête", by high profile appearances, and by an explicit ambition to make culture more accessible to audiences traditionally distant from state subsidised institutions from working class suburbs to under served rural areas and vulnerable groups such as people with disabilities.

It is this agenda of "desacralising" access to culture and addressing social, territorial and ethnic blind spots that Dati officially left unfinished when she resigned from the government in February 2026 to concentrate on her campaign for mayor of Paris, in which she

was re elected in the 7th arrondissement in the first round. Her legacy at the Ministry of Culture is therefore as much about tone and visibility as about concrete policies: a conviction that cultural institutions must reach out to those who currently remain on the margins, including the large share of disabled citizens whose right to culture is still far from guaranteed in practice.

CATHERINE PEGARD, A DISCREET STRATEGIST WITH DEEP CULTURAL ROOTS

Catherine Pegard's profile could hardly be more different. Before entering politics, she spent nearly three decades in political journalism, beginning at J'informe and Le Quotidien de Paris before joining the weekly newsmagazine Le Point, where she rose from reporter and special correspondent to deputy editor in chief and finally editor in chief of the politics desk. This long experience observing governments from the outside gave her a detailed understanding of institutional mechanics and the often fragile relationship between culture, media and power

In 2007 she moved inside the Elysee Palace as political adviser to President Nicolas Sarkozy, a position she held until 2011, before being appointed president of the public establishment of the Château, Museum and National Estate of Versailles, a post she would occupy for more than a decade. At Versailles she combined heritage management, cultural programming and state protocol, turning the site into both a major tourist destination and a discreet diplomatic stage. She also served on several advisory bodies linked to France's external cultural action, including the Foreign Action Steering Council at the Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, and took part in the governance of key cultural programmes and orders.

More recently, Catherine Pegard became director of cultural development at the French Agency for the Development of AlUla (AFALULA) in Saudi Arabia, then was entrusted with a governmental mission on corporate and philanthropic co funding of France's external action, before returning to the French Presidency in 2025 as special cultural adviser to the President of the Republic. Her appointment as Minister of Culture in February 2026 therefore crowns a long trajectory at the intersection of journalism, heritage, diplomacy and presidential strategy but without the constant media exposure that has accompanied Rachida Dati for nearly two decades.

TWO MINISTERS FROM THE SAME POLITICAL FAMILY (RIGHT), TWO VERY DIFFERENT APPROACHES

Politically, both women belong to the broad conservative and centre right family shaped by Nicolas Sarkozy's ascendancy, and both have navigated its networks and codes for years. But their styles and likely priorities at the Ministry of Culture set them apart. Where Dati instinctively occupied media space, using strong language and symbolic fights to put questions of access, identity and authority at the centre of debate, Pégard has so far favoured discretion, long term institution building and behind the scenes influence

The timing of Pegard's arrival also constrains her first steps. She took office in the middle of the municipal campaign, at a moment when the duty of political restraint limited the launch of any major new cultural initiatives, and when much of the public debate was captured by local electoral issues and the shock of the war in Iran. For now, her few public signals including her support for the new European convention on series co production and her emphasis on cultural sovereignty and heritage suggest continuity on some themes, but with a quieter, more technocratic tone than her predecessor.

As a newsroom that includes an accredited wheelchair using senior political and cultural reporter, our editorial team is particularly attentive to questions of inclusion, accessibility and the place of disabled people in France's cultural life. This perspective will remain effortlessly, guide our coverage of the new Minister of Culture's agenda, and we will closely monitor whether future policies and budgets effectively improve access to culture for the 17% of the population living with disabilities and for all audiences currently left at the margins of major institutions.

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