

Working hours and economic performance: What lessons can be drawn from the Coe-Rexecode report?

By [Eric Heyer](#) and [Mathieu Plane](#)

Do people work less in France than in the rest of Europe? Is France the only country to have reduced working hours in the last decade? Is the 35-hour work week really dragging down the French economy? The report published on 11 January by the [Coe-Rexecode](#) Institute provides fresh material for answering these questions.

We have produced [a note on the main conclusions of the report](#), which can be summarized as follows:

1. People work fewer hours in France than in the rest of Europe.

- TRUE for full-time employees,
- FALSE for part-time employees,
- FALSE for non-salaried employees,
- UNDETERMINED for the total.

2. Working hours have fallen more in France than in Germany over the last 10 years.

- FALSE

3. “The shorter work week has failed to meet the goal of job creation and work-sharing” in France.

- FALSE

4. “The shorter work week has undermined per capita purchasing power” in France.

AAA, AA+: much Ado About nothing?

by [Jérôme Creel](#)

The loss of France's AAA rating on Friday the 13th of January 2012 was a historic event. It poses three questions: should the austerity measures announced in autumn 2011 be strengthened? Why has Germany been singled out? And what is to be done now?

The loss of the AAA rating on French government bonds is not surprising – far from it. The sovereign debt crisis that has shaken the euro zone for over two years, starting in the autumn of 2009, was not managed properly because it occurred during a recession, at a time when all the EU Member States had their eyes glued to their own economic difficulties. In the absence of a concerted response that included immediate solidarity and mutual guarantees by the euro zone Member States of the zone's entire public debt, with the support of the European Central Bank (cf. Catherine Mathieu and Henri Sterdyniak, [here](#)), the foreseeable contagion occurred. The objective public finance mistakes committed by successive Greek governments followed by the vagaries of the Irish banks have now led to a systemic crisis in Europe.

By implementing austerity measures simultaneously, Europe's governments have magnified the economic difficulties: economic stagnation and even recession are now on the agenda for the euro zone (cf. Xavier Timbeau *et al.*, [here](#)). A downgrade of debt ratings in the euro zone was thus to be expected. It

does, however, raise three questions.

1. Should the austerity measures be strengthened? In a commentary on the supplementary 7 billion euro French austerity plan announced in November 2011, Mathieu Plane (see in French [here](#)) pointed out that the race for the AAA rating had already been lost. The impact of this austerity plan on economic growth was objectively inconsistent with the fiscal consolidation target – and Standard & Poor's was surely not unaware of this argument.
2. Why did S&P single out Germany and Slovakia, the only economies in the euro zone not downgraded on Friday 13 January? While their commercial links are undeniable (cf. Sandrine Levasseur, 2010, [here](#)), which could justify their comparable treatment, the main markets for both of these economies, and particularly Germany, lie in the euro zone. Slowing growth in the euro zone outside Germany will not leave the other side of the Rhine unaffected (cf. Sabine Le Bayon, in French [here](#)). It is difficult to see how the contagion of the crisis could stop at the borders of Germany and Slovakia. The recent take-up of German government 6-month bonds at a negative interest rate could even be interpreted to reflect extreme distrust of Germany's commercial banks. In any case, its economy, situated in the euro zone, is no less fragile than that of France.
3. What should be done now in France? The loss of the AAA rating reflects a negative outlook both for the state of public finances and for economic growth. While Germany has not been downgraded, it is possible that this is because S&P takes a positive view of its non-cooperative strategy in the past. From this perspective, the principle of a social VAT measure can be considered a way to help France catch up with Germany in terms of competitiveness, as Jacques Le Cacheux points out ([here](#)): if the Germans did it, why can't we? This would

help boost tax revenue by increasing the competitive advantage of businesses established in France. If such a measure were to be adopted, Germany and France would be on equal footing. The two countries could then sensibly consider a cooperative policy for a recovery in Europe. Some possible focuses include: industrial policy (cf. Sarah Guillou and Lionel Nesta, in French [here](#)); social policy; an ambitious climate and energy policy (cf. Eloi Laurent, [here](#)); and a financial policy that includes a common tax on financial transactions, with the revenue raised being used to ensure that the taxpayer would never again need to bail out the private banks, which would free up additional maneuvering room for the first three policies. The policy outlines would of course need to be defined, but it is crucial to recognize that policy action is urgently needed.

The very great recession

Economic outlook updated for the major developed countries in 2012

OFCE Department of Analysis and Forecasting, under the direction of [Xavier Timbeau](#)

The growth outlook for the developed countries, in Europe in particular, have deteriorated dramatically in recent weeks. The “voluntary and negotiated” devaluation of Greek sovereign debt securities, which is really nothing but a sovereign default, the wave of budget cuts being announced even as budget bills are still debated, the inability of the European Union to mobilize its forces to deal with the crisis – all these factors render the forecasts made two months ago

obsolete. For many European countries, including France, 2012 will be a year of recession.

The growth figures for the second quarter of 2011 in the developed countries, published in August 2011, put the positive signals from early 2011 into perspective. In the third quarter of 2011, the national accounts were better than expected, but the respite was short-lived. The economic indicators for most of the developed countries (see below and a [companion note](#)) heralded a reduction in activity in the fourth quarter of 2011 and [early 2012](#). The euro zone will be stagnant in 2012, with GDP growth of 0.4% and Germany recording the “best” performance in the euro zone (Table 1).

Tableau 1. prévisions pour 2012

		2011				2012				2011	2012
		t1	t2	t3	t4	t1	t2	t3	t4		
Allemagne	PIB	1,3	0,3	0,5	-0,1	0,1	0,1	0,1	0,1	3,0	0,4
	Taux de chômage	6,1	5,9	5,7	5,7	5,7	5,7	5,7	5,7	5,8	5,7
	Solde public*									-1,2	-1,4
France	PIB	0,9	-0,1	0,4	-0,2	-0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,6	-0,2
	Taux de chômage	9,2	9,1	9,3	9,6	9,9	10,2	10,5	10,7	9,3	10,3
	Solde public*									-5,8	-5,3
Italie	PIB	0,1	0,3	0,1	-0,2	-0,4	-0,4	-0,3	-0,3	0,7	-0,9
	Taux de chômage	8,2	8,1	8,2	8,4	8,6	8,8	8,9	9,0	8,2	8,8
	Solde public*									-3,9	-2,3
Espagne	PIB	0,4	0,1	0,0	-0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,0	0,7	0,0
	Taux de chômage	20,6	21	22,2	22,6	22,8	23	23	23	21,6	23,0
	Solde public*									-7,4	-5,4
Zone euro	PIB	0,8	0,2	0,2	-0,1	-0,1	0,0	0,0	0,0	1,6	0,0
	Taux de chômage	10,0	10,0	10,6	10,8	10,9	11,0	11,1	11,2	10,3	11,1
	Solde public*									-3,5	-2,9
Royaume-Uni	PIB	0,4	0,1	0,5	-0,1	0,0	0,2	0,2	0,2	0,9	0,5
	Taux de chômage	7,7	7,9	8,3	8,5	8,6	8,7	8,8	8,8	8,1	8,7
	Solde public*									-9,1	-8,5
États-Unis	PIB	0,1	0,3	0,6	0,4	0,4	0,1	0,2	0,3	1,7	1,4
	Taux de chômage	8,9	9,1	9,1	8,7	8,7	8,7	8,7	8,7	9,0	8,7
	Solde public*									-9,2	-9,2
Japon	PIB	-0,7	-0,3	1,5	0,7	0,6	0,6	0,4	0,4	-0,1	2,4
	Taux de chômage	4,7	4,6	4,4	4,5	4,5	4,6	4,7	4,7	4,5	4,6
	Solde public*									-8,8	-9,4

* En points de PIB.
Sources : Comptes nationaux, prévisions OFCE décembre 2011.

The first phase of the great recession, in 2008-2009, led to the swelling of public debt (about 16 points in the euro zone, more than 30 points in the US and UK, see Table 2). Phase II will be determined by how the public debt caused by the crisis has been digested: either low interest rates will make it possible to postpone the adjustment of public deficits and the economies can bounce back, thus easing the necessary adjustment, or the adjustment will be immediate, amplified by higher public interest rates and the persistence of under-employment (Table 3). Grippled by the fear of default, Europe is transforming the *great* recession that began in 2008 into a

very great recession.

Tableau 2. Besoins de financement, dettes publiques et caractéristiques de ces dettes

	All	Fra	Ita	Esp	RU	USA	JPN	Zi 4
Besoins de financement sur les marchés en 2012								
En milliards	251 M€	295 M€	391 M€	175 M€	257 M€	3151 M€	228 M€	1156 M€
En point de PIB	9,8	14,1	24,4	13,9	16,5	19,8	47,4	35,3
dont déficit public financé par appel au marché en 2012								
En milliards	20 M€	78 M€	91 M€	57 M€	104 M€	910 M€	52 M€	186 M€
En point de PIB	0,8	1,7	5,9	3,1	8,6	9,7	6,7	2,3
dont dette arrivant à maturité financée par appel au marché en 2012								
En milliards	231 M€	217 M€	369 M€	118 M€	122 M€	2261 M€	194 M€	950 M€
En point de PIB	9,8	16,4	22,5	16,6	7,8	14,1	40,7	32,6
Dettes publiques totales - 2011								
En milliards d'euros	2 062	1 891	1 884	588	1 081	11 064	9 516	6 207
En milliards de dollars	2 795	2 394	2 553	770	1 871	14 994	12 806	8 412
En milliards d'euros PPA 2010	2 051	1 829	1 869	500	1 081	10 270	11 544	6 239
En dollars par tête	34 383	33 238	42 109	16 895	29 922	46 530	101 536	33 177
En point de PIB	80,3	81,7	118,7	32,6	78,3	78,5	275,4	83,3
Variation par rapport à 2007	15,4	19,9	15,1	16,5	34,0	33,3	46,3	36,8
Dettes publiques de marché estimées au 31 décembre 2011								
En milliards d'euros	1 108	1 315	1 571	558	1 526	7 297	6 727	4 553
En milliards de dollars	1 302	1 782	2 129	756	1 787	9 890	9 016	6 368
En milliards d'euros PPA 2010	1 102	1 416	1 558	490	1 809	9 890	11 568	4 558
En point de PIB	45,3	45,0	99,0	31,4	35,4	44,8	168,8	42,7
En dollars par tête	18 568	27 385	33 136	16 572	28 786	36 678	71 505	24 322
Caractéristiques de la dette de marché								
Taux d'intérêt moyen sur la dette en 2011	nd	5,1	nd	4,0	2,2	5,3	5,9	nd
Taux d'intérêt moyen sur les émissions en 2011	nd	nd	3,5	nd	2,8	nd	6,5	nd
Taux d'intérêt moyen sur les émissions en 2012	6,9	1,5	4,3	5,0	2,0	1,4	6,5	2,9
Taux d'intérêt sur les émissions à 10 ans en 2012	2,8	3,2	6,3	5,3	2,5	2,2	3,1	4,3

Notes: la PPA est calculée par rapport à la zone euro, et tient compte des différences de structure de gains entre pays de la zone euro.
Sources: calculs OCDE décembre 2011, Statist, Agence de l'Info nationale.

Tableau 3. Évolution de la situation des chômeurs entre 2007 et 2010

En points de population active						
Évolution entre 2007 et 2010	Allemagne	Espagne	France	Italie	RU	
chômage	-1,6	11,9	1,3	2,4	2,6	
chômage de longue durée	-1,5	5,7	0,5	1,2	1,3	
chômage non indemnisé	-0,3	5,7	0,5	2,0	4,3	

Source: Eurostat.

After the “voluntary” Greek default, the euro zone countries have inflicted on themselves not only an adjustment that was even more brutal than that required by the Stability and Growth Pact, but also contagion and a general collapse in sovereign debt. The measures proposed by the European Union, from the EFSF to the adoption of the “golden rule”, have not been persuasive of its ability to solve the public finance problems of the euro zone members either in the short or long term, especially as Europe seems to have forgotten that growth and the restoration of full employment are fundamental to the sustainability of public debt and to the European project more generally.

Faced with the risk of insolvency on sovereign debt, creditors are demanding higher risk premiums to continue to fund both new debt and the renewal of the fraction of old debt that is expiring. The hardening of financing conditions, even as business prospects are deteriorating as a result of budget cuts, is nipping attempts at fiscal consolidation in the bud.

The result: a downward spiral. The rising cost of debt adds to interest charges, which undercuts deficit reduction and leads to additional fiscal discipline to reassure donors. The added restrictions weigh on activity and wind up augmenting the cyclical deficits – at which point the governments, panicked at the stubborn resistance of the deficits and the prospect of a downgrade in their sovereign rating, respond with even greater rigor.

Because the economies of the European countries are so closely intertwined, the simultaneous implementation of restrictive fiscal policies leads to magnifying the global economic slowdown by undercutting foreign trade (we developed this point in our [previous forecasting exercise](#)). Restrictive policies hit domestic demand in whichever countries implement them and thus reduce their output, but also their imports. This dynamic decreases the exports of their trading partners, and therefore their activity, regardless of their own fiscal policies. If these partners also implement a restrictive policy, then an external impact has to be added to the internal restriction (an indirect effect). The magnitude of these effects depends on several factors. The direct effects are mainly linked to negative impulses within each country. The indirect effect is more difficult to measure, since it depends on the degree of openness of each country, the geographical distribution of its exports and the elasticity of imports to GDP of the countries that are tightening their policy. Thus, a very open country for which the majority of exports are going to a country undertaking severe budget cuts will suffer a strong indirect effect. In this respect, the highly integrated countries of the euro zone will suffer more from the restrictive policies of their partners than will the United States or Japan. Their growth will be seriously curtailed, pushing back deficit reduction. In many countries, the coming recession is the result of the increasingly restrictive measures being taken to try to stabilize their debt / GDP ratio as soon as possible in an increasingly

unfavourable economic environment.

The race to tighten up to try to bring public deficits below 3% of GDP and to stabilize debt ratios is aimed as much at meeting the requirements of European agreements as it is at reassuring the rating agencies and financial markets. The latter, among them the European banks, hold at least 50% of the public debt of the developed countries in the form of securities issued by the national debt agencies. This percentage varies from 77% of the public debt held by financial institutions in France to 97% for Spain.

In the euro zone, between 9 and 23 percentage points of GDP of public debt, depending on the country, needs to be renewed in 2012 (see Table 2). Outside of Japan, it is Italy, which combines a high debt with a large proportion of short-dated securities, which will have the largest financing requirement. If requirements related to the financing of the public deficit in 2012 are added to this, then the potential for total issues in the euro zone ranges between 10% of GDP in Germany to 24% in Italy.

These high levels are posing problems for countries that have lost the confidence of the markets. If the interest rates at which these countries are financed in 2012 remain at their average levels for the last quarter of 2011, Spain would borrow at 5% and Italy at 4.3%. France and Germany, however, would continue to benefit from low interest rates (1.5% and 0.9% respectively). The issue rates in December 2011 for these two countries have up to now been little affected by the threats to downgrade the sovereign debt of the euro zone countries. Even though the financing need from the markets was greater in 2012 for the United Kingdom, the United States and Japan than for the euro zone, their rates have remained low. Paradoxically, the downgrading of the US sovereign rating in August 2011 was accompanied by a decrease in 10-year rates and short-term rates in the United States. Within this context of a flight to safety, the programs of massive purchases of

government securities on the secondary market that were implemented by the Federal Reserve (FED), the Bank of England (BoE) and the Bank of Japan have been keeping public long-term rates low. Monetary policy is also affecting short-term interest rates as well as long-term rates. The role of lender of last resort being adopted by these central banks is thus reassuring the markets and avoiding higher interest rates during Treasury auctions. In contrast, the ECB's mandate and the strict supervision of Europe's legal scaffolding limit ECB action. The relatively low amounts of government bonds purchased since 2010 (2.3% of euro zone GDP compared with 11% of US GDP for the Fed and 13% of UK GDP for the BoE) and tension between euro zone countries concerning the role of the central bank is fueling demands by investors to protect their risks by raising premiums.

To stop the collapse of European sovereign debt, we must rule out any possibility of a sovereign default, public interest rates must be reduced to the maximum by all means possible, and a European strategy for stabilizing the public debt needs to be implemented, first by dealing with under-employment, thereby renewing growth, followed by an adjustment of public finances.

Fiscal consolidation wrong-footed

By Sabine Le Bayon

Should deficit reduction be the priority of governments today?

The constraints imposed by the Stability Pact and especially by the financial markets on Europe's governments do not leave

them much leeway. But while there is no avoiding the issue of the sustainability of public debt, we also need to take into account the recessionary impact of austerity programs on economic activity, particularly during a period of recovery. The great majority of studies point to a positive multiplier effect, that is to say, a one point cut (expansion) in the budget results in a decrease (increase) in activity. Furthermore, studies have highlighted that in order to maximize a policy's impact, its *timing* is crucial: the impact on growth and on the public deficit (via its cyclical component) depends on whether or not it is supported by monetary policy, on the fiscal policy conducted by other countries, on the phase of the cycle, and so forth.

Fiscal consolidation, for example, has less impact on activity when it is accompanied by a relaxation in monetary policy and by a currency depreciation. But when interest rates are already close to zero (or in the case of a liquidity trap), the impact of fiscal restraint is not cushioned by a fall in base rates. As the central bank cannot counter disinflation, real interest rates rise, which amplifies the fall in activity. Moreover, in a context of generalized tightening, the exchange rate cannot be a means of supporting activity in every area. This is also true when a policy of fiscal restraint is being implemented within a monetary union where the countries trade mainly among themselves. Thus, according to [the IMF](#), the impact on growth of a budget cut of 1 GDP point can vary between 0.5% and 2%, depending on whether or not an austerity program is synchronized with the response of monetary policy (Table 1).

Ultimately, the impact on growth feeds back into the state of public finances. When monetary policy can counteract the recessionary effects of fiscal policy, a one-off budget cut of a single GDP point reduces activity by 0.5% after two years. The deterioration in the cyclical deficit then comes to 0.25 GDP point, and the balance ultimately improves by 0.75 point.

When interest rates are near zero, a one point negative fiscal stimulus in a country reduces growth by one point and worsens the cyclical deficit by 0.5 point, leading ultimately to an improvement in the deficit of only 0.5 GDP point. Finally, when a liquidity trap (or rates of zero) is combined with generalized budget cuts, a one GDP point negative fiscal stimulus reduces growth by 2 points, because neither monetary policy nor exchange rates can offset the impact of the cuts. This widens the cyclical deficit by one point, and there is therefore no improvement in the public deficit despite the one point structural effort.

Tableau 1. Impact of fiscal consolidation on growth based on various IMF hypotheses

	Interest rates greater than zero	Interest rates near zero
Isolated fiscal consolidation	-0.5	-1
Global fiscal consolidation	-0.8	-2

Source: IMF (2010).

Furthermore, the economy's position in the cycle influences the multipliers. At the bottom of the cycle, for instance, they are amplified: an austerity policy accentuates any deflationary tendencies at work, which intensifies the fall in demand and therefore the impact on activity. However, at the top of the cycle, the disinflationary effects of the austerity measures counteract the inflationary trend usually seen in this phase, thus reducing the multiplier. According to [Creel, Heyer and Plane](#), after one year, and depending on the policy instruments used, the multiplier lies between 1 and 1.3 points when the economy is in the bottom of the cycle (assuming an output gap of -2%) and between 0.8 and 1.2 points in mid-cycle (an output gap of zero) and the top of the cycle (for an output gap of 2%). At 5 years, the effect is even stronger: between 1 and 1.6 points at the bottom of the cycle, between 0.6 and 1.3 in mid-cycle and between 0 and 1.2 at the top of the cycle. Thus, when the output gap is negative, fiscal consolidation policies are not very effective because they lead to a significant decline in GDP compared to a scenario

with no restraint, which limits any fiscal gains to be expected from the austerity policies.

Today everything has come together for the austerity policies to lead to a significant slowdown in growth with little reduction in the deficit, especially in the euro zone. This is why we tried to assess the indirect impact, for France and the major developed countries, of the austerity measures being implemented by their trading partners, in addition to the direct impact of the various national plans. The impact of fiscal restraint (in country A) on demand from its partners (B) depends on the elasticity of imports with respect to the GDP of country A but also on the degree of openness and geographical orientation of exports of the B countries. In the case of France, for a national multiplier of 0.5, the total multiplier is 0.7, once the fiscal restraint policies of the partners are taken into account via foreign trade; for a national multiplier of 1, the total multiplier is 1.5.

Based on the fiscal packages planned in the various countries, we obtain an impact of foreign plans on national activity of between -0.1 and -0.7 point in 2012, depending on the degree of openness of the countries and the orientation of their trade (Table 2). For France, the restraint planned by its trading partners will cut growth by 0.7 point in 2012, which is almost equal to the savings plan set up by the government (1 point). In Germany, the impact of foreign austerity plans on GDP is close to that calculated for France: even if Germany is more open, it trades less than France does with the rest of the euro zone, and will benefit more from the US stimulus package in 2012. In the other euro zone countries, foreign fiscal cuts will have an impact of the same magnitude (0.6). In the US, the effects of the stimulus package will be undercut by the austerity measures being implemented elsewhere; while the direct effect of the stimulus package on GDP will be 0.7 point, the lower demand addressed to it will cut growth by 0.2 point, limiting the impact of the

expansionary fiscal policy. The slower than expected growth could render the deficit reduction goals obsolete. Using our assumptions of national multipliers of between 0.6 and 0.9, a one GDP point negative fiscal stimulus in all the EU countries actually reduces the deficit by only 0.4 to 0.6 GDP point in each country, once the fiscal restraint of the trade partners is taken into account.

Tableau 1. Impact of fiscal consolidation on GDP in 2012

	Direct effect	Effect via external demand	Total
France	-1.0	-0.7	-1.7
Germany	-0.3	-0.7	-1.0
Spain	-2.3	-0.6	-3.0
Italy	-2.1	-0.6	-2.6
United Kingdom	-1.9	-0.4	-2.3
United States	0.7	-0.2	0.5
Japan	1.4	-0.1	1.3

Sources: OFCE calculations and forecasts, October 2011.

This text refers to the [study of fiscal policy](#) (in French) that accompanies the analysis of the economic situation and the forecast for 2011-2012, available on the [OFCE web site](#).

What new European austerity plans await us in 2012?

By [Eric Heyer](#)

To meet French commitments vis-à-vis Brussels to a general government deficit in 2012 of 4.5% of GDP, the French Prime Minister Francois Fillon announced a new plan to cut the budget by 7 billion euros. Will the plan, announced 7 November, be sufficient? Certainly not! So what new austerity

plans should we expect in the coming months, and what impact will they have on growth in 2012?

In early October 2011, among the points we indicated in our forecast dossier was that, of all the finance bills approved in Europe, no major country has met its commitment to reduce the deficit.

This will be the case in particular of Italy and the UK, which could face a gap of between 1.5 and 2 percentage points between the final public deficit and their commitment. In the case of France and Spain, the gap will probably be 0.6 and 0.7 point, respectively. Only Germany will come very close to its commitments (Table 2).

Unlike in previous years, the implementation of these commitments would seem probable: in an uncertain financial context, being the only State not to comply with its promise of fiscal consolidation would be punished immediately by more expensive financial terms on the repayment of its debt.

This will therefore require the adoption of new austerity plans in the coming months. But by attempting to reduce their deficits too early, too quickly and in a synchronized fashion, the governments of the European countries are running the risk of a new downturn. Indeed, as we noted in a recent study, tightening budget policy during a cyclical downturn in all the European countries and doing so in a situation of a persistent "liquidity trap" is contributing to the formation of a strong multiplier, close to unity.

How many billion euros will be targeted by the next fiscal savings plans? What impact will they have on economic growth? Several possible cases were considered.

Case 1: Each country respects its commitment alone

In order to isolate the impact on growth of the national savings plan and those of the partners, we have assumed that each country meets its commitment alone. Under this

assumption, the effort would be significant in Italy and the UK, which would present new austerity plans for, respectively, 3.5 and 2.8 points of their GDP (56 and 48.7 billion euros). France and Spain would implement an austerity plan two to three times smaller, about 1.2 points of GDP, representing 27 and 12.1 billion euros, respectively. Finally, the German savings plan would be the weakest, with 0.3 point of GDP (7 billion euros) (Table 1).

Table 1. Amount needed to meet the public deficit commitments in 2012

	Germany	France	Italy	Spain	United Kingdom
If each country meets its commitment alone					
In billions of euros	7.0	27.0	56.0	12.1	48.7
In GDP points	0.3	1.3	3.5	1.1	2.8
If the EU countries respect their commitments					
In billions of euros	22.3	39.8	63.9	19.6	55.2
In GDP points	0.9	2.0	4.0	1.8	3.2
If the euro zone countries meet their commitments					
In billions of euros	16.6	36.1	61.7	17.9	
In GDP points	0.6	1.8	3.9	1.7	

Source: OFCE calculations.

These different national austerity plans, taken in isolation, would have a non-negligible impact on the growth of the countries studied. With the exception of Germany, which would continue to have positive growth in 2012 (0.9%), this kind of strategy would plunge the other economies into a new recession in 2012, with a decline in their GDP ranging from -0.1% for Spain to -2.9% for Italy. France would experience a decline in activity of -0.5% and the British economy of -1.9% (Table 2).

Table 2. Impact on GDP of meeting the deficit reduction commitments in 2012

In %	Germany	France	Italy	Spain	United Kingdom
OFCE forecast					
GDP	1.2	0.8	0.4	0.9	0.7
Public deficit (in GDP points)	-1.4	-5.2	-3.4	-5.0	-8.0
If each country meets its commitment alone					
GDP	0.9	-0.5	-2.9	-0.1	-1.9
Public deficit (in GDP points)	-1.3	-4.5	-1.5	-4.4	-6.5
If the EU countries respect their commitments					
GDP	-0.3	-1.7	-3.9	-1.5	-2.6
Public deficit (in GDP points)	-1.3	-4.5	-1.5	-4.4	-6.5
If the euro zone countries meet their commitments					
GDP	0.1	-1.4	-3.6	-1.2	0.3
Public deficit (in GDP points)	-1.3	-4.5	-1.5	-4.4	-8.2
Remainder of commitments for 2012	-1.3	-4.5	-1.5	-4.4	-6.5

Source: OFCE calculations.

Case 2: All the EU countries meet their commitment

Of course, if all the major European countries were to adopt the same strategy at the same time, then the savings effort would be greater. It would amount to about 64 billion euros in Italy and 55 billion euros in the UK, accounting for 4 and 3.2 percentage points of GDP, respectively. The additional effort would be about 2.0 percentage points of GDP for France and Spain (respectively 39.8 and 19.6 billion euros) and 0.9 GDP point for Germany (22.3 billion euros). In total for the five countries studied, the cumulative savings effort would represent more than 200 billion euros in 2012.

The shock on the activity of these countries would be powerful: it would cause a violent recession in 2012 for some countries, with a fall in GDP of -3.9% in Italy (against -5.1% in 2009), and -2.6 % in the UK (against -4.9% in 2009). France would be close to recession (-1.7%), as would Spain (-1.5%), while German GDP would decline slightly (-0.3%).

Case 3: Only the countries in the euro zone meet their commitment

As the UK has already implemented a substantial austerity program, and given that their constraints in terms of the deficit are more flexible than those of countries in the euro zone, we assumed that only the major countries in the euro zone complied with their commitments on the public deficit. Under these conditions, the cumulative savings effort would represent more than 130 billion euros in 2012, almost half of which would be from Italy alone (61.7 billion).

The recessionary shock would thus be focused on the euro zone, with a recession in all the countries studied except Germany (0.1%). The British economy would avoid a new period of recession (0.5%), but it would not meet the target of 6.5 percentage points of GDP for the public deficit, which would come to 8.2 GDP points.

