



Ambassador's Activities

2013

Distributor: French Embassy in the UK
- Press and Communications Services -
58 Knightsbridge, SW1X 7JT London
E-Mail: press@ambafrance-uk.org
Web: www.ambafrance-uk.org

Speech by HE Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the Annual General Meeting
of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain,
at the Reed Smith offices

8 July 2013

Cher Arnaud Vaissié, former President of the CCFGB and new President of the Union of French Chambers of Commerce and Industry Abroad,

Cher Arnaud Bamberger, new President of the CCFGB,

Cher Peter Alfandary, former Deputy President, and *cher* Richard Brown, new Deputy President,

Managing Director,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It fills me with great pleasure to attend my third Annual General Meeting of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain this evening. This meeting marks a turning point in the Chamber's history, because you've just elected a new President and a new Vice-President to lead it, and I want to warmly congratulate them.

I'd like to pay a glowing tribute to the remarkable work done by the Chamber's outgoing President, Arnaud Vaissié, and Deputy President, Peter Alfandary.

Mon cher Arnaud, in February I had the pleasure of awarding you the insignia of *Officier* in the *Ordre national du Mérite*. It was a special moment, both for you and for me – a career highlight. This evening, I'll be emphasizing above all the outstanding contribution you've made to French economic diplomacy.

Since you were elected in 2003 as President of the French Foreign Trade Advisors' UK section, you've always devoted much of your energy – which I know is boundless – to strengthening the relationships between French and British companies. In 2007 you were elected President of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain, and the six years

you've just spent as its leader have been extraordinarily intense. This experience will be particularly invaluable to you as you prepare to take up your new global responsibilities as head of the UCCIFE, and you'll continue to cite this Chamber as an example and provide it with additional resources!

During your mandate, you've carried out two missions: to help SMEs overcome obstacles to going international and to make the Chamber a place where the maximum number of companies can really come together, as well as an exchange, dialogue and meeting-place.

People often point to our SMEs as one of France's weak points in the area of foreign trade, on the grounds that they're too timid to take to the international stage. Under your impetus, the Chamber of Commerce has very much developed its offer of services to these companies. On this point, you've been ahead of the field. Your exceptional success as leader of the International SOS group, which you founded and have led for nearly 30 years, explains a great deal, including your sympathy for entrepreneurs and your intimate understanding of their needs in the face of internationalization.

The Chamber of Commerce now provides essential support to our companies as they settle here and develop – support complementary to that of UbiFrance – and relations here are excellent. By providing an advisory service to bosses determined to set out on the international path, it eases the burden on them, enabling them to dedicate themselves to their core business, which is what they do best. Today 110 companies benefit from this support structure.

Under your presidency, *mon cher* Arnaud, the Chamber has also become a real platform for meetings and discussions, particularly through its clubs and forums, which have grown in number. Some 40 events are organized by the Chamber of Commerce every year! Congratulations, too, to the whole team led by Florence Gomez, our *Chevalier* in the *Ordre national du Mérite*. I'd also like to welcome the new initiatives taken to this effect under your mandate, like that of the “*Rendez-vous chez*”, which provide opportunities for players in the same sector to meet on the premises of a member company to share ideas and experience.

Thank you also for so warmly welcoming the countless delegations of ministers, members of parliament and senior officials who come and draw inspiration from what's done here.

You're also a crucial member of the Embassy's Economic Council, which I recently set up at the request of Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius, Economy and Finance Minister Pierre Moscovici and Foreign Trade Minister Nicole Bricq and which is set to become *the* [*prononcé: “thee”*] structure for dialogue between the different players in economic diplomacy in the United Kingdom. This structure today brings together the Chamber of Commerce, of course, the Foreign Trade Advisors, well-known personalities and the Embassy's different services: the *Service Economique Régional*, UbiFrance, the *Agence française pour les investissements internationaux* and *Atout France*, bearing in mind that changes in our operations could soon be announced.

You've just been elected head of the Union of French Chambers of Commerce and Industry Abroad, taking over from M. Pierre-Antoine Gailly. With the government thinking, as the British just have, of reorganizing its network to foster companies' international development,

your experience and creativity will be crucial assets for informing French economic diplomacy.

Cher Peter, let me now turn to you and pay tribute to you in turn, because you also constantly contribute not only to the excellent economic relations between France and the UK but also, and above all, to understanding between these two countries, which are so different and yet so close. You're a major contributor to the Chamber of Commerce's bureau, which you joined in 1986. For 27 years you've observed at close hand the transformation of the French and British economy and society. Elected Vice-President of the Chamber of Commerce in 2007, you've provided a British voice that is listened to on the Chamber's board.

Cher Peter, the book "Light at the end of the tunnel", which the Financial Times devoted a whole page to in its weekly magazine and which I frequently hear talked about, will be an enduring symbol of your successful tenure as the Chamber's Deputy President. Anthony Hamilton, the former chairman of AXA UK, also mentioned it during the speech he delivered when I awarded him the insignia of *Chevalier* in the *Légion d'Honneur*. This instructive little guide compares current codes in business relationships in France and the UK meticulously and with refreshing humour; but as to whether it's French or British humour, I'll leave the readers to be the judge of that!

Cher Arnaud Bamberger, my warmest congratulations to you on your election as President of the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain. You know this Chamber only too well since you've been on its board for many years. We've got to know each other very well since I came to London and I'm familiar with your immense qualities: they have made you one of the key representatives of the French luxury goods industry in the UK. Everyone knows you

in London. You have an outstanding reputation, notably among the Royal Family and big businesses, and I know that you will do a tremendous job in the position, which I thank you for accepting. I am sure that you already have many ideas on how to take the Chamber forward.

Cher Richard, I now turn to you to congratulate you and tell you how pleased I am at the prospect of working with you. We'll shortly be going to Scotland together for a trade mission, along the lines of the one to Leeds I conducted a few months ago with Arnaud Vaissié, because, like you, I think it's necessary to be active and make oneself known not just in London but throughout Britain, where there are many development opportunities for our companies.

To conclude, and with my thanks to all of you for your commitment, I should like to go over what I expect from the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain.

We need you and we need to work together even more closely to reduce our trade deficit and meet the goals outlined by the government. Our priorities more than ever are foreign trade and getting foreign investment in our country to drive our growth, create jobs and combat youth unemployment. More than ever, trade diplomacy is at the heart of the French authorities' action, and to carry this out we need you.

The UK still accounts for France's highest trade surplus worldwide, with a balance of €6.6 billion in 2012, 16% up on 2011. As far as investment is concerned, France is the second most popular destination for British investment. In 2012, 36 new projects and over 800 extra jobs were created thanks to this British investment on French soil. With 65 investment

projects, France was the second-largest European investor in the UK in 2011 and 2012, neck and neck with Germany.

The Chamber of Commerce's strength has been its ability to persuade both French and British companies to join it: nearly half of all the member companies are from Britain or other foreign countries. As such, the Chamber has been able to build a valuable networking platform and a fine showcase of French know-how.

Its strength has also been its ability to bring together both major established corporations and expanding SMEs – a diversity which reflects France's industry.

We've got to continue this battle together, with your help and all together. Growth and employment – this is the government's major goal. It's what lay behind President Hollande's desire to reorder Europe's priorities back in the summer of 2012. It's what was central to our action at the Lough Erne G8 summit, as I expanded on in my ambassador's brief. It's what we're doing at the European Councils. It's what lies behind our efforts here too, in support of our big companies, with opportunities ahead of us in the areas of energy, sanitation, defence and also in the cultural industries. It's what we bear in mind when preparing for our forthcoming engagements: our Foreign Trade Minister's visit to London on 9 September, for which you will be mobilized, and the pursuit of my missions on the ground, accompanied if possible by representatives of the Chamber or the Foreign Trade Advisers' section. I have one soon in Guernsey, and then another with you in Scotland following other missions undertaken outside London.

Finally, let's bear in mind the importance of forthcoming engagements, beginning with the bilateral Franco-British summit, due to be held at the end of this year or the beginning of the

next. To prepare for these meetings, I need very strong involvement by all the economic players in the UK, beginning with the Chamber of Commerce. *Cher* Arnaud and *cher* Peter, thank you for everything you've done for us and will continue to do – Arnaud as head of the UCCIFE and Peter as Senior Vice-President of this Chamber, of which you'll remain a pillar. *Cher* Arnaud Bamberger, you've already done a lot for our country here, and you're going to do even more at the head of that major organization.

Cher Richard, I wish you too every success in this new post and would like to express my full confidence in you./.