



Ambassador's Activities

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

“France, Britain, the EU and the World”

University of Bristol, 14 March 2012

Vice-Chancellor,
Honorary Consul,
Ladies and gentlemen,

It's a very great pleasure for me to come and speak to you today at one of the best universities in the United Kingdom, on my first visit to this great city of Bristol, a city that has strong ties with France. I was able to experience this strong relationship first-hand yesterday, when I attended the farewell reception for the French director of the science centre At-Bristol; then this morning, when I visited a very dynamic French primary school; and finally just now, when I met members of your faculty and fellow students, either French themselves or with close links to my country.

In choosing such a broad topic, "France, Britain, the EU and the World", my intention was not to give you a formal lecture on international relations. Instead, I'm here to answer any questions you might want to ask a French official who has been involved in shaping and conducting French diplomacy for nearly 30 years.

But to launch our discussion, allow me to share with you a few French thoughts, first of all on Anglo-French bilateral relations (I) and secondly on where we stand today with regard to the European project (II).

I/ Anglo-French bilateral relations are excellent.

Both our countries are extremely committed to national sovereignty and independence. But this does not mean converging views are impossible: on the contrary. We have both come to the conclusion that this cooperation, especially when it comes to defence and energy, is not only possible but also necessary if we want to preserve the very capabilities that can guarantee our independence.

President Sarkozy and Prime Minister Cameron chaired the Franco-British summit at the Elysée Palace on Friday, 17 February 2012. The summit was an opportunity to enhance our priority areas in this bilateral cooperation.

First of all, foreign policy as a whole. Within the EU, France and the UK have a shared commitment to peace, democracy and freedom that is unequalled. We're both permanent members of the United Nations Security Council and two-thirds of its resolutions are of Anglo-French initiative.

When it came to facing up to the Libyan crisis and the prospect of slaughter in Benghazi, France and Britain were convinced from the first minute that we had to act and that we couldn't let a bloody dictator continue to inflict suffering on his people. And this gave rise to the whole operation in Libya and the success we know. Today, we have very similar views about Syria – the Syrian scandal, because it's a scandal for a dictator to be able to massacre his people –, and about Iran and Afghanistan, as well as a shared determination to ensure democracies don't suffer the diktat of dictatorships.

Secondly, France and Britain have also made an absolutely strategic choice, namely the choice of nuclear energy. Our cooperation really is remarkable. We're going to develop it, in order to promote a sustainable mix of nuclear and renewable energy sources. This will enable us to keep producing affordable electricity, maintain our energy independence and meet our climate change targets.

Thirdly, a major subject of cooperation between our two countries is defence. Let's be clear about it: Britain and France account for the bulk of Europe's defence policy effort, while each retaining national sovereignty. Our British friends have great armed forces and a great military tradition; France likewise. We work together. Yesterday I was at a defence industry conference not far from Bristol. The event highlighted the unprecedented progress we're making on cooperation in the procurement field.

Indeed, for defence matters, our cooperation is based on two mutually supportive pillars.

First, on the operational side, the engine and goal is the creation of a Joint Combined Expeditionary Force to respond to jointly identified threats and capable of intervening in operations, whether they be to support the United Nations, NATO, the EU or indeed an ad hoc coalition. This goal presupposes a process of convergence in many fields – such as doctrine, concepts and training – and this of course requires enhanced interoperability.

Second, in the procurement field – which was the purpose of the conference yesterday near Bristol – we aim to take our cooperation to a new level, in a more systematic search for cooperation. In other words, we're working together to have top-level armed forces, with equipment of the highest standard, to improve our armed forces' interoperability, and finally to maintain in our countries a high-performance industrial capability at global level, representing a combined turnover of more than €40 billion. This is essential in critical areas to keep our operational sovereignty or operational freedom of action.

Of course there have also been subjects where we've had our differences – but they relate to France and Britain's traditional positions on Europe.

This brings me to where we stand today with regard to the European project

II- Europe is at a crossroads but it has to move forward, preferably with everyone on board

Indeed, in a world where interdependencies are growing stronger and imbalances creating more risks than ever, Europe constantly shows how relevant it is and how valid its project is. As a union of 500 million inhabitants and the world's leading market and trading power, the EU makes each country that belongs to it stronger on the international stage.

Thanks to the European project, we make our voice heard better collectively. We uphold our vision of the world more effectively. We can better promote our model of a social market economy. We're more effective and visible in furthering our plans in the international arena and winning over the rest of the world to our goals. This is demonstrated by the EU's driving role within the G20 but also on all the big issues of international current affairs. And in this driving role, France and Britain often provide extra horsepower.

Europe is overcoming a very serious crisis. None of the European nations can claim to be able to emerge from the present crisis alone, whether or not they belong to the Euro Area and whether or not they intend to join it.

At the same time, the sovereign debt crisis has weakened the European project, testing the Euro Area's solidity and the coherence of its project. It has led us to doubt the long-term survival of the EU, reminding us we can never take anything for granted.

France is convinced that the time has come to lay the foundations of a more stringent and at the same time more mutually supportive EU. That's the thrust of the efforts she's been making for several months, in close consultation with Germany.

Europe has started putting its public finances and internal organization back on their feet, with one goal: to be more efficient, responsive and mutually supportive and thus put right its original design fault, which was to have carried out monetary union before resolving the issue of economic governance.

We want to give the euro a second wind, both as a shield against shocks and an engine of the single market, which is a factor of prosperity and a precious common good. People in the UK perhaps more than anywhere else recognize the true value of the outcome of 60 years of building Europe, to which France is also extremely committed, as long as it is properly harmonized.

Today we want to take a new step towards integrating our economic policies, which can no longer be conceived independently of each other. Beyond all our efforts to overcome the sovereign debt crisis, the issue really is to rescue and revitalize Europe and the huge project it represents.

Because let's be quite clear about it: through Europe, the role of each of our countries in the world is at stake.

That's why France is still resolutely committed to the future and the deepening of the European project.

Through Europe our role in the world is at stake, amid the emergence of new powers. If a new world emerges that gives other continents their rightful place, that doesn't mean the European model is outdated: quite the contrary. It's natural for globalization to lead emerging countries to start catching up and for this trend to spark tensions.

Globalization is, above all, an opportunity for millions of people to emerge from poverty. And it's also a challenge for the more privileged nations, whose long-standing prosperity is being challenged.

But this catch-up phase will one day come to an end, and the problems we have today will be shared by the new industrialized countries. In the meantime, Europe must become aware of its trump cards – first and foremost, its creativity and resilience. Despite the crisis and international competition, Europe's share in world trade has been maintained at over 26%. The crisis is forcing us to “do better with less”. Let's not forget that the European Union is still the most perfect model of regional integration in the world. We have on our side the quality of our human capital, infrastructure and technology. Indeed, Europe has modern infrastructures, competitive businesses and centres of scientific, technological and academic excellence enjoying worldwide influence, of which your university is one of many examples.

Yet, maintaining our rank is a considerable challenge. The world has changed profoundly, and perhaps the most complex idea to understand is that, in order to keep the France and Britain we love and to preserve the system we have, we too must change.

Today, two of the world's three largest economies are Asian, Brazil is going to overtake the UK, and for the past 10 years Latin America as a whole has experienced sustained growth of about 6% a year.

The emerging countries provide an unprecedented opportunity for our economies, with access to strongly growing markets of several hundred million consumers – an opportunity to discover new areas of investment and new, fertile grounds for scientific and intellectual cooperation.

In order to grasp these opportunities, we must build a balanced and responsible relationship with the emerging countries that benefits everyone. A balanced relationship means rethinking the relations between the emerging countries and Europe. In response to China, India and Brazil, the European Union too often moves forward divided. That's harmful. If we want to be credible, our dialogue with those countries really must be conceived at European level.

This is why France insists that the EU's competitiveness, and reciprocity in trade with the emerging countries, should be put at the top of our common agenda.

Conclusion

Before taking your questions, I'd like to try to persuade you to be "Euro-optimists".

The growth of the emerging countries doesn't mean we're doomed to economic and geopolitical decline. Europe's humanist, universal values are still powerful and continue to resonate throughout the world. Europe still has major strengths in every sphere, as well as being an area of democratic and social cohesion that is unique in the world.

So let's not succumb to scepticism or to the belief that everything is in decline, or the fear of being strategically relegated, or to pessimism. The European Union is destined to remain one of the most prosperous and influential areas in the 21st century, as part of a fairer, better organized, multipolar world.

The crisis, as is so often the case in the adventure of building Europe, has allowed us to make significant leaps forward. In the space of just a few months, we've carried out a profound transformation of Europe and the Euro Area.

We're establishing the real economic government that Europe and the Euro Area so badly needed. We're going to bring about the effective economic convergence of our countries – essential in the context of monetary union, which has benefited every member of the single market. In this way, we're radically reforming our shared area to take on board all the consequences of the crisis we're experiencing today, so we can bounce back, be stronger and remain an unrivalled centre of attraction and reference point in our globalized world.

Thank you ladies and gentlemen. I'll be happy to answer your questions./.