



Ambassador's Activities

2012

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

at the 14 July reception

London, 14 July 2012

Secretaries of State,
Ministers,
Members of Parliament,
Councillors of the Assembly of French Nationals Abroad,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Chers compatriotes, dear friends,

It's an honour for my wife and me to welcome you to the French Residence on our National Day. We are doing things differently this year. With us today we have our British partners and friends and the diplomatic community, together with some leading representatives of French community institutions here in London. The thousands of London French, whom we can no longer invite here, won't miss out on the Bastille Day festivities since "France in London" has organized a private party for them in Kensington Palace Gardens. But I can tell you one thing hasn't changed: the celebration of our friendship on France's National Day. And I'd like to thank our very many sponsors for their support.

I arrived here three months ago and am delighted to be in this wonderful city in a country with which France has such longstanding ties.

Succeeding my friend, Ambassador Gourdault-Montagne, who brilliantly flew the tricolour for France and contributed to a significant expansion of our relations, I greatly appreciate the honour bestowed on me by the President of the Republic and realize the demanding nature of my task.

Our two countries are together tackling many challenges: finding our way back to growth, restoring our public accounts to a sound footing, improving the employment situation, and increasing our competitiveness in the face of the great emerging countries – all this in tough economic times. Moreover, we are both endeavouring to maintain our positions and roles on the international stage and our political, economic and also cultural influence in a constantly shifting world.

Rarely have our relations been as good, trusting and substantive: President Sarkozy came to Britain three times in 2010 and our Prime Minister François Fillon was here in January this year. And the pace of our relations has quickened since the historic Franco-British defence treaties signed last November: ten French ministers have visited London since I arrived, including Christine Lagarde and Defence Minister Gérard Longuet. And our *Ministre d'Etat* – equivalent to your First Secretary of State – Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Alain Juppé, is coming to London at the end of July. Prime Minister David Cameron was in Paris in late April and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg was there last week.

One of the main reasons we have stepped up our operational consultation at every level is our common commitment in Libya.

Together we intervened to prevent a bloodbath in Benghazi and protect the Libyan people, strictly in accordance with the Security Council resolutions, as part of the NATO operation in which our two countries are shouldering the bulk of the burden. Together we are promoting our values in that part of the world

Together, implementing our ambitious defence agreements, we will be more effective as well as getting “the best value for money”. We will maintain our status and our positions in the world and be able to envisage the procurement of high-quality military equipment, despite our extremely tight budgets.

Together, we are developing an industry-level partnership in the field of energy, and particularly nuclear energy, with a real vision of the future.

Together too, we worked to make a success of the Deauville G8 summit which gave strong support to the Arab Spring and the aspirations of the peoples of those countries which are our friends.

Together, we are working on the preparation of the Cannes G20 summit and the United Kingdom is bolstering our ambitious agenda with the strength of her proposals.

This autumn’s Franco-British summit will have to focus on new developments in all these areas. We want to be ambitious for our relationship, ensure it endures and remains at the highest level. For our country, the Franco-British relationship is a major bipartisan priority. Everything we have built and created will be pursued long term. Indeed 2012 will be a crucial year in French political life, with our presidential election in the spring, followed by a general election, with, for the first time, French people resident abroad electing their own members to the National Assembly. Of course it will be a great year in the UK too, with your Olympic Games a really high point in your national life. Admittedly, Paris was very disappointed when we lost out to London, but, as you know, we’re very fair-play minded! And I want to tell you that, besides doing all she can as a close neighbour, to assist in such areas as transport, with lots of people travelling to and fro between our countries, and, quite obviously, security, France is keen to help you make the Games a huge success.

You may rest assured that we will remain ambitious and exigent for this Franco-British bilateral relationship. For us it is, and will always be, a strategic priority.

Indeed, in a few days’ time, our new European Affairs Minister and then Alain Juppé will be coming here precisely to signal how necessary it is for us together to meet our common challenges from Libya to our response to the Arab Spring, as well as the challenges the European Union is facing particularly with the Euro Area. On all these fronts, we know that we can support each other and work together in total confidence.

Long live France!

Long live the United Kingdom!

Long live the friendship between France and Britain!