



# 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](mailto:press@ambafrance-uk.org)  
Web: [www.ambafrance-uk.org](http://www.ambafrance-uk.org)

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

speech at the Mansion House dinner hosted by Councillor Russell Goodway

Cardiff, 18 March 2013

Councillor Goodway,  
Mr Poole,  
Mme Rapport,  
Mrs Helga Rother-Simmonds,  
Ladies and gentlemen,  
Dear friends,

*Bore da*

It's an honour for me to be a guest of Cardiff County Council this evening, and I thank Councillor Goodway and Claude Rapport for giving me the opportunity to meet and talk to the men and women who make Cardiff such a dynamic and welcoming city.

It is three years since a French ambassador last visited Wales, so it's a particular pleasure to be here today.

As French Ambassador to the United Kingdom, I attach great importance to visiting all the nations and regions which make up the UK and give her vitality and strength. This morning I've discovered a country steeped in history, nature and tradition. I've discovered a proud people, especially proud of their language, *Cymraeg* [*prononcé : keum-raïgue*].

And yet, bordered as she is by the sea, Wales is no less open to the world, and Europe in particular. During my visit to the National Museum of Wales and the Royal Welsh College of Music and Drama this afternoon, I was particularly fascinated by your country's rich cultural life. And of course Wales has provided Europe and the rest of the world with some great writers and artists – I'm thinking of Bertrand Russell, Dylan Thomas, Roald Dahl, Dame Shirley Bassey and Sir Anthony Hopkins, to name but a few.

As you know, France and Wales enjoy longstanding and extremely fruitful relations. I won't perhaps dwell on the issue of rugby, since we French have good and bad memories of our last meeting. But don't worry: we don't hold any grudges against you, because the Welsh team performed outstandingly during the Six Nations.

I should like to begin by talking about economic and trade relations between France and Wales. As you are aware, a large number of French companies are established in Wales – especially in Cardiff – and are making a significant contribution to jobs in the region. I was talking to the business minister this morning about the presence of Alcatel Lucent, Véolia, Capgemini and the Saint-Gobain group. I hope these companies can go on forging ties with other Welsh economic players, not least with you, dear friends.

Exchanges between our two countries in the cultural and education fields are also firmly established. Tomorrow I'll have the pleasure of meeting academic staff at Cardiff University, which has over 250 French students. More progress has been made on Franco-Welsh academic exchanges than ever before, and French is the number one foreign language studied in Wales.

The vitality of these relations also stems from the substantial presence of nearly 1,000 French people in Cardiff, making it the UK's 10<sup>th</sup> city in terms of the number of French nationals. I'm also pleased to note that Cardiff's French school, *La Petite Ecole de Cardiff*, has taken on 90% more pupils since last year. I know that the French Honorary Consul's support has played a decisive part in this.

I'd like to conclude this short speech by talking about Europe. During our meeting together, First Minister Carwyn Jones and I spoke at length about the future of EU, and in particular the future of its relationship with the United Kingdom.

There are many challenges facing Europe today. At a time when the Euro Area is emerging from the crisis which hit it in 2008, the EU must give itself the economic and political instruments which will make it more integrated and therefore stronger, because we think that its future successes will depend on there being solidarity, not a return to national egoisms.

This is why, with the respect and friendship France and all her European partners have for Britain, we're watching with interest and concern the debates here about the future of relations between the UK and the EU. We believe this temptation to move away from Europe would have disastrous consequences for the British, and thus the Welsh, as it would for the whole of Europe.

As you know, Britain's membership of the European Union has a real, tangible impact in Wales:

- In terms of figures, for the 2007-2013 programming period, Wales will have received around £1.8 billion from the Structural Funds.
- Up to December 2012, EU projects in Wales created more than 16,000 jobs and almost 4,500 companies, helped 45,000 people into work and 120,000 to gain qualifications.
- In addition, Wales is receiving €378.4 million from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development for the same period.

Conversely, Europe has been enriched by Britain's contributions: since 1973, the British have made an outstanding contribution to deepening the single market and to the continent's integration. I might add that 150,000 jobs in Wales depend directly on the smooth running of the single market. The British have also played a driving role in trade negotiations, working to make the EU the world's most open regional organization.

I wanted to highlight these points because they must inevitably carry weight in the debate which will be getting under way here in the coming months and years, so that the discussions it generates aren't confined to simplified arguments and simplistic slogans.

Of course, Europe must address the many challenges it faces. We're fully aware of this and determined that it should. It must be transformed, it must be more competitive, its internal market must be more coherent and it must offer greater prospects in terms of jobs – especially for young people – and prospects for developing its businesses, especially its SMEs. We shall all – political, institutional and economic players – have to take up these challenges together. But we believe that by focusing on solidarity and mutual understanding rather than increasingly powerful egoisms, a stronger, more credible and more protective Europe will emerge. We'll all be winners in that Europe – a competitive, inclusive, sustainable Europe.

Diolch. Thank you./.