



# Ambassador's Activities

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

at the HE International Unit conference

19 November 2013

Mrs Newman,

*Cher* Rudolf Adam,

Professors,

Members of the International Unit, members of the DAAD,

Ladies and gentlemen,

I'm delighted to be addressing you at the end of a day which I know has been full of intense and fruitful discussions about a subject close to my heart and crucial for Europe: cooperation between European universities in a time of globalization. I'd like to thank the organizers and particularly the International Unit, but also the DAAD, for choosing this theme and managing to bring together so many distinguished experts. I'm joining you to share a few personal thoughts and assure you of my support in your initiatives for more cooperation and European mobility.

**1. More cooperation means more excellence and therefore more competitiveness and jobs for Europe**

In a world gripped by profound technological, scientific, economic, societal and environmental changes, Europe must today confront challenges we all share. We must also face increased international competition against a background of doubt in Europe, linked in particular to the economic crisis. How can we take up these challenges and how, at a time of global upheavals, can we be actors for change? Indeed, how – nationally and at European level – can we develop our economic, academic and cultural attractiveness? We must innovate, and innovation is found first of all in universities and research laboratories.

Investing in training and research means investing in our common future; it means investing in economic success. Through significant funding, particularly of the Erasmus Plus and

Horizon 2020 programmes, Europe has acquired a broader range of tools to boost its competitiveness. The priorities of these programmes are known. In France, the higher education and research act of 22 July 2013 offers new opportunities.

## **2. Developing a “European reflex”**

However, while increased funding for higher education and research is certainly a key point, it's only one aspect of the proactive policy we must conduct together. To this end we have many strengths. We're working towards the same goal, despite having different approaches and methods. Our differences are also a strength; they force us to establish links and imaginative ways of cooperating; today those differences are broadly complementary. We compare ourselves to each other, we share good practice – as we're doing today – and we combine our efforts to achieve the necessary critical mass in the international arena.

Higher education and research in Europe have really begun to develop a “European reflex”, and we must trumpet and explain it. With voices critical of Europe constantly making themselves heard, our countries must give people back a taste for Europe and make people dream of Europe. Contact at civil society level and closer ties between our peoples are fuelled by, among other things, close relationships between students, alumni and researchers.

We must bring our systems closer together, make them more compatible and remove the remaining obstacles. We must seek to support the emergence of a generation of students who can create a truly European profile for themselves. Mobility for studies or internships, including in professional and technological sectors, must be further increased. Dual degrees must be encouraged everywhere.

Our success will depend on simplification, the overall coordination of structures and their financing methods, support for innovation and for the transfer and better coordination of regional, national, European and international strategies.

### **3. The instruments available to us (the example of the UFA)**

The Franco-German University (UFA), for example, which plays a role of expertise in Franco-German academic relations, is an invaluable institution. It's committed to promoting relations and exchanges between French and German higher education establishments, particularly in order to ensure binational degree courses and Franco-German programmes are implemented in the area of doctoral training and research. Today there are 5,500 French or German students in the UFA's establishments. It's managed to develop a network of alumni who have acquired a Franco-German and European reflex, whatever their current field of activity in the national, European and international arenas.

Unfortunately, no similar Franco-British, Franco-German-British or – to my knowledge – German-British instrument exists today. Admittedly, Franco-British dual degrees are developing and, at master's level, there are some 40 dual degrees involving about 30 French higher-education establishments. However, they require institutional commitment to become established in the long term. Franco-British doctoral cooperation and doctoral mobility – leading in particular to joint tutorials – have still not got off the ground. Nevertheless, it's in those very breeding grounds that the networks of Franco-British excellence we'll need tomorrow are born.

Driven by a desire to develop these networks of future researchers and future European economic and political players, France and the United Kingdom have also, since 1995,

developed a bilateral programme of excellence: the Entente Cordiale scholarships, granted to master's or doctoral students.

We must step up this cooperation. More cooperation and more in-depth cooperation means more excellence and therefore more competitiveness and jobs for each country and for Europe.

#### **4. Rebalancing Franco-British mobility**

One of the most gratifying aspects of my mission as Ambassador in London is to represent France in a country whose universities are among the most remarkable in the world. And I'm not talking only about Oxford, Cambridge or London but also about universities like Edinburgh, Cardiff, Bristol and Leeds, where I've had the pleasure of meeting students, lecturers and researchers and talking to them about Europe. I'm struck by the very high quality and dynamism of those institutions and the extraordinary calibre and diversity of the students. It's right for French establishments to forge even ties with these great "European" universities. Large numbers of French students choose to study in the UK during part of their degree courses. The UK is the leading destination for French students (25% of French students abroad are here). That's undeniably the right choice. Choosing this mobility gives them threefold added value: disciplinary, linguistic and cultural. They broaden their horizons and develop thanks to a constantly changing environment.

However, I regret the fact that Franco-British mobility isn't more balanced. Around 6,500 French people study in the UK through the Erasmus programme and some 12,800 are registered directly in British universities; British laboratories are home to 1,500 French researchers on post-doctoral contracts. But only 2,500 British people are registered in French

universities through the Erasmus programme, and they're really too few in number overall. The gap must be filled.

### **5. Our European commitment to multilingualism**

Admittedly, the lack of knowledge of the French language is certainly still a handicap. Our *grandes écoles* have long provided teaching in English, and I'm delighted that teaching in French universities is now being conducted in foreign languages, and English in particular.

This teaching in English in France is nevertheless only part of the answer. Learning foreign languages is still an imperative for all Europeans. In a multicultural world in the grip of rapid changes, the ability to alter one's perspective and outlook, and to move easily between cultures in order to understand others better and define oneself better, is crucial. And without this ability that learning a foreign language affords, there can be no in-depth understanding of another culture. The much-talked-about "multicultural skills" are in fact intrinsic to our multilingual European identity.

To quote Umberto Eco's famous phrase, "the language of Europe is translation": translating culture, ways of thinking, translating those little nuances that are so decisive and underpin our rich diversity. Students who have acquired those abilities during their studies abroad have learnt to move between cultures, establish links and also, in a sense, constantly "translate". They strongly increase their opportunities in the European and global labour market, where inventiveness, creativity and adaptability are required.

Learning foreign languages must start early. French is still the main foreign language learnt by British pupils, but too few young people learn it. That's why France is actively supporting the teaching of French in the British school system. In November 2011, I signed an

educational cooperation agreement between France and England to strengthen the role of French, in order not only to support the learning of the French language but also to develop some teaching in French. A month ago I signed an educational cooperation agreement with the Scottish government, encouraging mutual understanding and the learning of each other's languages. We thus hope to catch young Britons at a much earlier stage and prepare them to go and study in French establishments and do internships in French companies. But we'll need a lot of time.

Ladies and gentlemen,

In the years to come we'll have to tackle new challenges. The majority of Europeans are still committed to the European idea, but many criticize European leadership – not without reason – and in the minds of the public, confusion is taking hold between the idea and its implementation. In order to remedy this, one way forward is certainly to bring European decision-making closer to citizens and launch visible, tangible European activities. Very recently, the French Minister of Culture announced a great forum on Europe and culture, a forum driven by the idea that culture gives Europe meaning. Academic cooperation and research between France, Germany and the UK is a good example of our societies becoming intertwined. But in this era of globalization, the extensive opening-up that Europe began more than a generation ago must become a genuine European reflex for future generations.

I want to thank the International Unit, the DAAD and the *Institut français* for organizing this day. Such meetings, where political and higher-education players can debate and share good practice at a high level, help not only gradually remove the remaining obstacles but also to define pragmatically the new instruments for deepening a Higher Education Europe. This

Europe is more necessary than ever; we must convey its importance to all students, researchers and professors in our countries, and explain loud and clear to Eurosceptics the inevitable achievements and the great promise of this Research and Higher Education Europe.

Thank you./.