



Ambassador's Activities

2013

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

Dinner hosted by the Bailiff of Jersey

25 April 2013

Mr Bailiff,

Lieutenant-Governor,

Chief Minister,

Cher David Myatt,

Ladies and gentlemen,

It is a pleasure and honour, Sir Michael, for me to be at La Mare Vineyards this evening for this dinner you are so generously hosting for us. It's a privilege for my wife and my delegation to be your guests, and we're extremely touched by the very kind welcome you have given us.

Since my arrival yesterday evening, I've discovered an island that is steeped in history, nature and tradition, and provides an exceptional quality of life.

Since this morning I've been able to talk to all Jersey's authorities, and we recalled and highlighted the historical ties France maintains with the island, and discussed the opportunities for cooperation opening up to us.

The closeness of our relations admittedly owes much to the island's geography, its proximity to the Normandy coast. Barely 20 kilometres separate us. But it doesn't just come down to geography, because history, too, has woven the extremely close ties which unite us today.

On more than one occasion Jersey has welcomed some of France's most eminent figures. I'm of course thinking of Victor Hugo and his exile. He spent over three years here, during which time he wrote Les Châtiments [The Punishments] and Les Travailleurs de la mer [The Toilers of the Sea]. I also want to mention the historic and somewhat extraordinary stopover General de Gaulle made in Jersey on 17 June 1940 when his plane, on its way to London from Bordeaux, ran low on fuel. This is a little-known yet crucial episode in the Second World War, the day before his 18 June Appeal.

Our relations are anchored in a shared past, at times one of conflict, but they resolutely look to the future.

They are evident today in Jersey's significant French community, some of whose members have been here a long time. With over 2,000 people, it plays a full part in the island's economic, social and cultural life. In this respect I would like to pay tribute to our honorary consul, David Myatt, who does a remarkable job, and whom the French community and the Jersey authorities recognize as a very great interlocutor.

I welcome the fact that several major French companies have established themselves on the island, such as BNP Paribas, Mazars and Société Générale, and Rubis and Total in the hydrocarbons sector, as well as Saint Gobain and EDF, which is a partner of the Jersey Electricity Company. I also note that nearly 20,000 of our compatriots come to Jersey every year, but we should do more and encourage people-to-people exchanges. This, I know, requires better transport links.

At cultural, educational and linguistic levels, our ties are equally strong. The Maison de Normandie et de la Manche, the Ecole FLAM and the *Alliance française de Jersey*, which I'll be visiting again tomorrow, are local institutions that enable school exchanges and the teaching of French on the island to develop. By choosing your island to host a working seminar bringing together all the UK's *Alliances françaises*, we're sending you a clear message that we want to enhance the place of French in Jersey. In this respect, the *Alliance française*, which has nearly 670 people enrolled this year, is already progressing in its activity, since it is now in charge of providing training in French for civil servants and elected representatives. But we need to do more and take things further.

The project to create a French-speaking – and why not a bilingual – primary school in Jersey would be an extra bonus for linguistic and educational cooperation. This fine project, promoted by Sir Philip Bailhache, is particularly relevant because families want their children schooled in French and currently don't all have the means, despite the services offered by the Ecole FLAM, which has about 40 pupils. We'd be ready to support such a project, but it would have to be led by Jersey's public authorities.

I'd also like to mention France-Jersey cooperation in the fields of heritage conservation, tourism and maritime safety. This cooperation takes the form of specific projects: just now I mentioned the creation of a Francophone school, but I should also mention the opening of a maritime nature park, the improvement of sea rescue coordination and the laying of a third undersea electricity cable ensuring Jersey is supplied with energy from France.

These projects enjoy the support of Basse-Normandie Regional Council and Manche General Council, in addition to the action of Manche department's prefectural authorities and particularly of my friend, *Préfet* Adolphe Colrat, who recently visited the island accompanied by the Chairman of Manche General Council. Their cooperation with the Jersey authorities – and particularly with the Bureau de Jersey in Caen – is excellent, and we're working hand in hand with *Préfet* Colrat and the elected representatives.

I'd also like to tackle a subject which is still in the news, even though a lot of progress has been made since 2008: the strengthening of cooperation on tax transparency.

As you know, this goal comes in the framework of comprehensive action by the French government aimed at reducing our deficits and returning to the path of growth while consolidating the public finances – among other things through control of our tax revenues – and raising moral standards in certain practices in finance, which must increasingly be put at the service of the real economy.

This approach enjoys broad consensus among the international community: the G20 finance ministers, meeting in Washington on 18 and 19 April, paved the way for the widespread adoption of automatic information exchanges. Their final communiqué stipulates that the G20 countries *“welcome progress made towards automatic exchange of information, which is expected to be the standard, and urge all jurisdictions to move towards exchanging information automatically with their treaty partners, as appropriate.”*

These subjects also form the road map for the British presidency of the G8 summit, to be held on 17 and 18 June, which, in the words of Prime Minister David Cameron, will be centred on trade, tax and transparency.

France fully subscribes to this British agenda. On the fight against money laundering and fraud, the President said recently – and I quote – *“The first principle is the automatic exchange of information for the benefit of the tax authorities. This must be the rule worldwide, because it's a simple rule. France said so in Dublin last week, at the European Union Council of Ministers. We want these information exchanges within Europe to be automatic, systematic, and also for this to be the rule we establish for ourselves with third countries.”*

So the EU's action in these areas is resolute. I believe the European Councils of recent months – which went a long way towards pointing the EU in the direction of financial sector regulation – have turned a new page. The informal meeting of finance ministers in Dublin on 12 and 13 April gave a decisive boost to automatic information exchange, and the fight against fraud and tax evasion will be on the agenda of discussions at the European Council of 22 May.

In these fields, only concerted and coordinated action will be effective and enable us to move towards greater transparency, greater financial security and therefore a more prosperous and fairer world. We've already made progress together, with the signature on 23 March 2009 of an agreement to exchange information on demand, in accordance with the regulatory provisions. This agreement came into force in 2010, it's beginning to work, and we must continue our joint efforts and the good dialogue between our tax administrations in order to go further. In this regard we're very interested in the Jersey government's position, and I have no doubt we'll be able to take up this challenge together.

The second challenge we face today – and we think it's linked to the first – is growth.

The President recently recalled the major priorities of France's economic policy. To get the economy back on track, a balanced approach is needed which combines restoring the public finances to a sound footing, ambitious economic reforms and the active search for growth. A great deal has been done in a year:

The [National] Pact for Growth, Competitiveness and Employment of 6 November 2012 proposes 35 concrete measures that will reduce labour costs and revitalize investment;

The creation of the Public Investment Bank, vested with a capacity of €42 billion, will facilitate access to innovative financing by SMEs;

Finally, the bill to increase job security, resulting from the historic agreement reached with the two sides of industry in January 2013, will profoundly reform the labour market, giving both more flexibility to businesses and new rights to employees.

So the government has started to focus our tax system on encouraging competitiveness and innovation; this will go a long way towards sustaining the attractiveness of our country, which already receives nearly €40 billion in direct investment from abroad every year. The

government is also creating the conditions for structuring our economy around key industries, and has supported strategic sectors through a policy of targeted investment.

Finally, we've reoriented the EU's economic policy towards growth, in particular by campaigning for the adoption of the €120-billion plan for investment and jobs, decided on at the European Council of June 2012.

So we're moving forward, working towards a France and a Europe which are more attractive and more competitive but also more responsible and which set higher standards for their partners.

This is France's message today: a message of seriousness and effort, but also of optimism and ambition. During what is a fascinating working visit for us all in the French delegation, I'd like to convey to you personally this message of friendship, cooperation, good-neighbourliness and developing our relations in all fields .

Thank you once again for your welcome and hospitality./.