



Ambassador's Activities

2013

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

at the Franco-British Business Awards

26 November 2013

I'm delighted to be among you for this major event, organized by our two chambers of commerce. For the fourth consecutive year, the Franco-British Business Awards will reward innovation on both sides of the Channel, honouring those companies that have seized opportunities on both sides of the border and brought their plans to fruition by drawing on our two countries' strengths.

This evening perfectly symbolizes the solidity of the economic relationship between France and the United Kingdom in many and varied fields including the strategic sectors of energy, the environment and transport, which are particularly well-represented among the companies nominated tonight.

I'm delighted to see, among those nominated, two large French companies that have a presence in the UK and have carried out major investment there: Veolia and Alstom. These two companies symbolize the importance of the different economic partnerships forged between our two countries. For its part, Veolia employs more than 16,000 people in the United Kingdom. In the energy sphere alone, our French companies' investment in the UK in recent years amounts to billions of pounds, accounts for some 30 to 40,000 jobs and covers the whole United Kingdom, from Scotland, where I recently led a CCFGB economic mission, to the Channel Islands, which I visited recently – the first time a French Ambassador has done so for a long time.

I'd like to take this opportunity, of course, to welcome once again the historic agreement in October between the British government and EDF Energy for the construction and operation of the new British nuclear programme's first power station at the Hinkley Point site. Fifty-seven years after the first nuclear plant was inaugurated by Her Majesty The Queen, and 18

years after the last plant became operational, the UK has chosen French industry to build the first part of its new nuclear fleet.

It's a success for the British economy and employment, as David Cameron himself has emphasized, and obviously a very great success for our country, its nuclear industry and the confirmation of our experience in the area which this contract in the UK will provide for all the projects we're involved in around the world. This is also the largest French investment in the UK for decades, and it's about both the profile and the credibility of our industry and technology in that country, which are further strengthened. It's also a success for our economic diplomacy, as promoted by President François Hollande and Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius.

As our Foreign Trade Minister reiterated during her recent visit to London, export contracts and France's attractiveness are closely linked. Investment in the UK promotes French technology and contributes directly and indirectly to jobs in France – energy being the most shining example. And these projects by our big groups must now lead to other contracts, for our SMEs.

SMEs are also being given pride of place this evening and I'm pleased about this, with innovative companies being nominated in various fields, from the digital, e-commerce and software sectors to the furniture trade and ethical and recyclable toys.

Our two countries are facing the same challenge, that of increasing the number of exporting SMEs. We have ambitious targets on this, ones which require us to support the development of a network of innovative SMEs which are capable of gaining a foothold in foreign markets.

This is why I'm delighted this evening to hear stories of young, dynamic, innovative SMEs which have succeeded brilliantly in breaking through into each of our two markets.

I want to thank our two chambers of commerce again for their constant commitment, their all-out efforts and this exceptional partnership linking us. Well done on this joint event, which is becoming an important date in the calendar, and I'd like, in advance, to congratulate the winners, but also the nominees, because I know the jury has had an extremely tough time deciding between the candidates.

Thank you./.