



Ambassador's Activities

2012

Distributor: French Embassy in the UK
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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

Annual reception of the Franco-British Lawyers Society

House of Lords, 30 January 2012

Lord Speaker,

Attorney General,

Lord Hope,

Lord Phillips,

Sir Michael,

Judges, professors, lawyers,

Lords, ladies and gentlemen,

Dear friends,

It's an honour and a pleasure for me to be a guest this evening at this very prestigious venue, and I'm especially keen to pay tribute to Baroness D'Souza, who has honoured us with her presence, as well as the Attorney General, Dominic Grieve, who I know is committed to judicial cooperation between our two countries, as he showed recently by chairing the Franco-British seminar organized by the Franco-British Council and entitled "Youth, Justice and Family Breakdown".

My participation in one of your previous meetings was cancelled due to an urgent and unexpected meeting in Paris. So I'm particularly happy to be among you this evening.

Yours is one of the bodies that helps keep the Franco-British relationship alive in civil and professional society.

As you know better than anyone, this relationship is extremely strong, substantive and friendly.

It's strong, first of all, because our authorities are determined to foster it at the highest level of our states and governments. Proof of this is our defence treaties of December 2010 – treaties which go to the heart of our sovereignty and the defence of our vital interests and which commit us over several generations.

The message I want to send here this evening is that whatever our differences on subjects related to European economic governance, whatever the outcome of the French election, the crucial importance of this relationship cannot be called into question or even affected.

The Franco-British relationship is also substantive, and this meeting is an excellent example of it, because it's also the business of the hundreds of thousands of Britons and French people who live, work, travel and interact with one another. By virtue of their professional activity, their choice of residence and the friendships they have forged, they all contribute to it on a daily basis and at all levels, for the greater good of our two nations.

That's why I am taking the opportunity today to pay tribute to the *démarche* by all those senior magistrates, academics, members of the legal and judicial professions who created the Franco-British Lawyers Society in 1988.

The aim of this welcome initiative was to establish effective cooperation between high-level law professionals in the United Kingdom and France, in order to remedy the difficulties arising from the disparity between our two legal systems.

It was a visionary initiative.

At your meetings in recent years, you've discussed shared problems relating to all areas of the law.

Indeed, over the past 25 years legal cooperation between our two countries has become absolutely crucial, particularly due to the requirements of the European Union. We must adopt common rules of conduct or find solutions compatible with our respective legal systems.

That's an everyday reality in both our countries and a daily job at our embassy.

For example, in the criminal sphere, more than 250 letters rogatory issued by French judges are handled here in the UK every year. Likewise, British requests are followed up in France.

These requests on either side of the Channel are put into effect thanks to the mutual-assistance mechanisms established, even though our legal systems are different.

In France today, each bill is preceded by a preliminary impact study including an examination of comparative law. In one year, our embassy compiled more than 30 notes on comparative law, whether they be about conditions in custody or working as a lawyer in the UK.

In March 2012, the UK judiciary and Crown Prosecution Service will be receiving 12 students from the *Ecole nationale de la Magistrature* for a one-month course.

The joint initiative you took, as French and British law professionals over 20 years ago, to form the association meant that you were enlightened pioneers.

The differences between them will thus no longer be obstacles but, rather, thought-provoking and a source of inspiration. I also want to emphasize that at international level, France and the UK are shaping international law: 80% of Security Council resolutions are prepared jointly by our two countries. So we play a central role in all fields of the law.

The Franco-British Lawyers Society has done – and continues to do – a remarkable job in fostering a better understanding of our two legal systems. Those systems must seek solutions acceptable to all, with due regard for the basic principles of the lives we live in society.

Your society thus plays an invaluable role, for which I congratulate and thank you./.