



Ambassador's Activities

2015

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Speech by HE Sylvie Bermann,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

at the launch of *Goût de France*/Good France
at the French Residence in London

London, 03 March 2015

Ladies and gentlemen,

Albert Einstein used to say that “an empty stomach is not a good political adviser”. The destinies of entire countries have sometimes been determined by a single dinner, whether in the case of Talleyrand and Fouché plotting the succession to Napoleon, Francis I and Henry VIII at the Field of the Cloth of Gold, or Wellington and Blücher sealing their unity a few days before the Battle of Waterloo in 1815.

I’d therefore like to express my deepest gratitude to all of you for being here tonight and taking part in this wonderful event, because your creativity, calibre and expertise all contribute to France’s diplomatic influence in the world. Many of the UK participants are present today, showing your commitment to this project. *A nos participants francophones, je voudrais dire “merci!”. Merci pour votre implication, votre volonté à mettre vos talents au service du rayonnement de la France.*

Your skills are a part of what makes France special. Churchill said to his officers on the eve of D-Day: “remember, gentlemen, it’s not just for France we are fighting for, it’s champagne!” France’s gastronomy is part of its identity, and it is central to the position we hold on the international stage.

I am pleased that, since 2010, the world has recognised this excellence: indeed, the gastronomic meal of the French is included on UNESCO’s List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. And now people around the world will come together, on 19 March, to experience French dining for themselves.

And this is the purpose of Operation Good France. Simultaneously, on every continent, over 1,300 restaurants will hold a dinner *à la française*. I myself will take part in this special event by hosting a dinner at the French Residence on the same evening, 19 March. And all 21 of you will join in this celebration by serving up your own interpretations of French cuisine: from local bistrotts to fine dining, from London to Glasgow, you embody a diversity and originality which we are here to celebrate. Some of the menus I have seen are simply mouth-watering: from French dishes prepared in the traditional way to modern interpretations of classics, they show off French culinary excellence at its finest.

We will therefore be gathering to showcase France and confirm our country's reputation. France's creative cooking is part of the "French touch", the originality and spark that we also show in other areas. And since Good France will be happening two days before a crucial rugby match, I'd like to make a special mention of our "French flair", recognised on rugby pitches worldwide.

In addition to being a diplomatic success, the project is aimed at fostering growth and employment in this economic sector. Let's remember that the catering industry is France's fifth-largest job sector and that the wine industry accounts for the second-largest surplus in our trade balance.

So gastronomy is paramount to French tourism and to global economic diplomacy. That's why French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius has drawn up, with the Tourism Promotion Council, a list of 20 actions to be taken to boost our image on the international stage.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly as I welcome here 21 of the great names of gastronomy in the UK, this project is also a way to offer fine gourmet cuisine to all nations and cultures; to promote the French way of life; and to provide an opportunity for quality time with family and friends. So many of our problems can be solved by sharing a simple, delicious meal!

To conclude, why is cuisine so special? Because it's both a means and an end in itself. It makes a difference in so many areas: diplomacy, the economy, relationships; but it is also in itself a celebration of good taste, elegance and the pleasures of life. To paraphrase Virginia Woolf, one cannot live well if one has not dined well. I heartily thank all of you for adding to the *joie de vivre* of so many./.