

**Event to commemorate
General de Gaulle's Appeal of 18 June 1940
French Residence, 20 June 2016**

Ladies and gentlemen

Dear friends,

On Saturday we gathered at Carlton Gardens to commemorate the Appeal of the Eighteenth of June and recall everything we owe the United Kingdom and the support found here by a breakaway two-star general.

On my visits, de Gaulle often accompanies me like a towering guardian figure: for example, to the site of the airfield in York where two squadrons of French bombers took off; or to Jersey, which I visited recently and where he stopped to refuel on the seventeenth of June nineteen-forty.

Julian Jackson, one of our distinguished speakers this evening, tells me de Gaulle ordered a coffee there and frowned at the pale beverage he was served. As Sir Edward Spears observed: "His martyrdom had begun"...

And yet, I'm convinced we don't sufficiently explore the part de Gaulle played in the exceptional relationship that has united our two countries for nearly a thousand years. We'll be remembering this relationship in Hastings on the fourteenth of October – in commemorations that will counterbalance those of Waterloo last year!

We certainly remember that de Gaulle would not have succeeded without the support of His Majesty's government and the strict faith which Churchill, in spite of everything, maintained in him throughout. We remember less about his legacy, both in institutional terms and as a great twentieth-century leader.

Indeed, this legacy has shown itself to be far-reaching outside France itself. I find it fascinating to be watching at close quarters as the referendum – the Gaullist weapon par excellence – takes institutional root in the motherland of representative democracy. The sometimes stormy relationship de Gaulle had with the UK also had a long-term impact on the way our peoples and leaders perceive one another.

Despite this exceptional closeness, it seems to me there is still a certain strangeness about de Gaulle in the eyes of my British friends.

Churchill summed it up this way in one of the sketches he had such a talent for: “He looks like a female llama who has just been surprised in her bath”. His doctor, Lord Moran, extended the animal metaphor, describing the Free French leader as “an improbable creature, like a human giraffe, sniffing down his nostrils at mortals beneath his gaze”.

Our brilliant speakers this evening will help us overcome the incomprehension that still rather obscures de Gaulle’s place in the British collective memory.

I am most grateful to Jacques Godfrain, Chairman of the Fondation Charles de Gaulle, for being with us tonight. I very much hope this high-level meeting will enable the Fondation to forge beneficial links for the future.

You’re all familiar with the mind and writings of Vernon Bogdanor, and I’m very grateful to him for being here this evening – despite being so much in demand –, especially because I believe he regards de Gaulle as something of a prophet of Europe.

I know that our friend Robert Tombs will be treating us to the very personal mix of erudition, clear-sightedness and wit that enables him to speak so incisively about the “sweet enemies”. *Cher* Julian Jackson, you’ve devoted the best part of your

academic life to de Gaulle and are putting the finishing touches to a biography which I'm very much looking forward to.

Sadly, a last-minute hitch prevented Jonathan Lynn from crossing the Atlantic to join us, but he kindly sent us a speech that will be read on his behalf.

Before that, production manager David Leigh-Pemberton will, if he agrees, say a few words on behalf of the team behind the play *The Patriotic Traitor*, which I found utterly captivating.

As for the subject currently occupying our hearts and minds, I'll say only a word. In our great man's stances and the phrases he uttered, which many a scribe hurriedly recorded for posterity, it's easy to find a clue to what he would tell us today: "I have been proved right".

De Gaulle was, admittedly, opposed to the United Kingdom entering the Common Market. He believed he often saw the spectre of Britain's vassalization to its American cousin behind the supreme interests it invoked. He of course lampooned the repeated negotiations with the British, whom he suspected of wanting to join the European enterprise purely on their own terms.

But de Gaulle was familiar with a Britain that believed it could cut itself off from Europe and live in line with the imperial and maritime path it had forged. He was protecting a Europe which had made the Common Agricultural Policy its core. He feared the diversionary power of a Britain which, in his words, “had manipulated the continent’s states for more than two centuries”.

Yet, being the great visionary that he was, he anticipated that the United Kingdom would play its role in Europe – in four to eight years, as he said in nineteen-sixty-three.

However, he added that “this won’t happen before the matter is basically decided by the British people”. And, more fundamentally, the Europe which the founder of the Fifth Republic so wanted to see was one which needs the UK and in which the UK plays its full role: an independent, powerful Europe, where every country retains its soul; a Europe of peoples, and not – I quote – “something for professionals which is limited and has no future”.

Today, at a time when Europe is called upon to take up new challenges on its southern flank and is exposed to competition not imagined even by de Gaulle, who was extremely clear-sighted when it came to China's power, I'm utterly convinced that the UK breaking away would damage it, insofar as it is a historical anomaly in light of the international responsibilities our two countries share.

Churchill, perceptive psychologist that he was, remarked about the French that "Their difficulty is to like what they have done". I'm tempted to throw this epigram back at our British friends, who forget how much of a mark they've made on Europe over the past forty years and more.

If they forget, I fear the only thing left for us to say on the twenty-fourth of June will be what Edith Piaf said: "Ne pleurez pas Milord".

I now give the floor to Jacques Godfrain.