

Baroness, *chère* Tessa,

Mr Vice-Chair, *cher* Dominic,

*Chère* Ann,

Members and friends of the Franco-British Council's British Section,

I've only been here since last September, but what a long way we've come in the past eight months!

For a French ambassador, the Franco-British Council is many things rolled into one: a top-class reception committee, a programme of work, a source of new friends and a constant encouragement to think about future Franco-British relations in ways transcending the sometimes over-restricted framework of interstate relations.

You've proven this on many occasions since my arrival:

- with conferences on complex and controversial issues of the future, like the conclusion of the TTIP and the challenges uniting us, like transport policy;
- with your continued work of decentralized cooperation, with a seminar organized in Lille comparing the development of decentralization in our two countries;
- and with another very successful Annual Defence Conference, now an unmissable date in the diary of our two countries' most senior officials.

And of course I haven't forgotten the high-level conference we're organizing together on 11 June [*the eleventh of June*] to celebrate the 800<sup>th</sup> [*eight hundredth*] anniversary of the Magna Carta: it would have been a pity, indeed shocking, if the great wave of commemoration sparked by this event had omitted to draw a link between our two traditions.

Because the Magna Carta is a text which borrows from Norman law and was drawn up under the impetus of the Archbishop of Canterbury, Étienne Langton, on his return from France.

And our country echoed the work done by yours in terms of public freedoms, with the Fundamental Laws of the French Kingdom in the Middle Ages and later, of course, the adoption of the Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen in 1789 [*seventeen eighty-nine*].

Today, common law in the UK and continental law engage in ever closer dialogue on human rights: the role played in this regard by the European Court of Human Rights in Strasbourg will doubtless be central to our discussions. And I expect these to have a great impact on France's participation in the talks the British government wants to embark on in London and Strasbourg about the international protection of human rights.

There's no doubt – and this example proves it – that there will be new highlights over the coming year that will enrich the Franco-British relationship and sometimes, perhaps, put it to the test!

How could it be otherwise, with the school year due to begin with the Rugby World Cup and finish with football's UEFA [*prononcer: iou-é-fa*] Euro 2016?

As you will have guessed, these events, and the celebrations they entail, are not the only things on my mind...

The Prime Minister has received a clear mandate on Europe, or rather on rethinking the United Kingdom's involvement with the European enterprise. I'm personally convinced that a referendum is unavoidable in the short or medium term. And I'm delighted that the ideological debate began the very day after the election, with a dynamism that is a credit to the democratic tradition of the world's oldest nation – England, according to the latest work by my friend Robert Tombs, who is here tonight – and to the culture of pluralism now infusing the whole United Kingdom. The thrilling election process we've just experienced was such a testimony to this!

I'll be doing my utmost in the coming months to ensure that regular, constructive and fruitful dialogue is embarked on between our governments, so that misunderstandings are dispelled and our two countries' shared views and destinies are affirmed. And I know that, in Paris, Sir Peter Ricketts will do likewise.

Very soon, François Hollande will have a meeting in Paris with David Cameron; this high-level discussion must continue, and you will play your part in it. *Making the case for Europe*: that's the title you picked for the celebration of your 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2013, and I believe it's an essential element in your mission statement.

More than ever, in the coming months, your role as a bridge will be essential: a bridge between our political classes, a bridge between our economic players and, above all, a bridge between our civil societies.

Edward Heath and Georges Pompidou wanted the Franco-British Council to be created, to support the UK's entry into what was then called the European Community and what – as a BBC political journalist recently told me – people here insisted on calling the “common market”. The Council is a crucial cog in our bilateral relationship. With a second referendum vote looming, and with Europe larger and more integrated but less popular than in the 1970s [*nineteen-seventies*] among citizens shaken by globalization, the Council's role will be to demonstrate the exceptional richness of our bilateral relationship.

I don't intend to list here the different elements of that relationship, because the field is so vast.

- First of all, we're linked by our peoples' fondness for one another. Twelve million Britons visit France every year, and 3.6 [*three point six*] million French people cross the Channel. The bond is also cultural, as shown by the success of current exhibitions in London dedicated to Sonia Delaunay, the dealer Paul Durand-Ruel and even the American painter John Singer Sargent, who was virtually Parisian.

On my visits up and down the country I meet academics and students who, despite everything – the fascination with China, in particular –, maintain a passion for French language and literature. And I sincerely hope that the gearing-up of the French education system in London – with, in particular, the opening of the Lycée Winston Churchill in September – will enable many young Britons to follow in Dominic Grieve's footsteps and undertake part of their studies in one of our schools.

- We cooperate closely on all the current major international issues. We're both involved in the coalition against Islamic State; the UK supported France's action in Mali. Together, we're on the front line in the Mediterranean migrant crisis because we're two of the most desirable lands of refuge in Europe. We're tackling the radicalization of young Muslims born and bred in our countries in very similar ways, and equipping ourselves with the same tools.

Finally, France and the UK are both setting their sights very high on the climate conference to be held in Paris this December. Our two diplomatic networks, often regarded as the world's

foremost, are actively engaged together in making sure that the world does not ignore a meeting of major importance to the planet's future and its inhabitants' security and health.

Our cooperation within the Security Council is unparalleled; I've had the opportunity of witnessing this several times during the course of my career: 75% of the proposals discussed there are drafted by France and the UK. And our two countries vote the same way in 95% of cases, whereas the UK votes the same as the United States in only two-thirds of cases.

- In defence matters, our joint projects have seen a dramatic scaling up which is unique in Europe, thanks to the momentum injected by the Lancaster House Treaty. The British were involved in our white paper and we in turn shall be involved in their Strategic Defence and Security Review.

- Finally, our two economies are intertwined: more than 3,100 French subsidiaries have set up in the UK, and France is the number one European destination for British investment. Exchanging our know-how both ways across the Channel is a source of wealth for the economic development of our countries.

In the Queen's Speech, which will be revealed to us in exactly a week's time, I'm sure we'll find other opportunities to cooperate, to measure ourselves against each other, to discuss and, in the end, to make our way together. The ties between what Clemenceau termed "the French colony that went wrong" and its "sweet enemy" are too long-standing and close – and also too strategic – for us not to do everything in our power to continue making our way side by side.

So I can only ask you to remain what you are: a suggestions box, an engine for discussion and proposals, so that we find ever more common ground to consolidate this unparalleled friendship.

Thank you.