

Speech by H.E. Sylvie Bermann
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom
at the opening of the Franco-British Digital Conference
Thursday 12 November 2015

Madame la Ministre, chère Axelle Lemaire,

Monsieur le Ministre,

Deputy President [*Stephen Burgin*], Managing Director [*Florence Gomez*],

Ladies and gentlemen,

When he received his Nobel Prize for Literature in December twenty-fourteen, the French writer Patrick Modiano said he belonged to the transitional generation, before everything was digital. He explained that people today can no longer concentrate on one activity as in the past, because time has speeded up.

A few years ago, few people would have imagined filling up a hall with the leaders of major groups and SMEs to discuss digital technology and start-ups. And yet, a growing number of you believe that your businesses' future is online, in the cloud, in data analysis and e-commerce, and that going digital is an imperative for business.

In market terms, the customers you target, in France and the UK, dedicate their free time increasingly to new forms and modes of consumption. Your strategy has changed, because some of you are opening or financing incubators and investing in the growth of young businesses, forging partnerships impossible to imagine just five years ago.

I'd like to thank the French Chamber of Commerce in Great Britain for organizing this conference, because rarely do so many economic decision-makers and entrepreneurs come together in a Franco-British context to discuss the digital sector. Thanks also to the Franco-British Council, which has always supported us. And this year, I also welcome the role played in preparing and organizing this conference by the FrenchConnect London Club, comprising a hundred or so French entrepreneurs and investors in tomorrow's economy in London.

The Franco-British Digital Conference is proposing a discussion entitled "Small meets Big". Today, there's undeniably a shift to another, more innovative economic model, and supporting this change is a sign of our two countries' strength. In the course of my first year as Ambassador to the UK, I've met French businesses in several cities such as Belfast, Bristol and Manchester. I've only ever witnessed innovation and a desire to succeed. The historic partnership we have between France and the UK has been bolstered today by the digital transformation. I'd like to emphasize that the contracts being won by French businesses in the UK are increasingly linked to their technology. For example, JCDecaux's connected screens are going to be installed in a thousand London bus shelters. French companies' factories in the UK use objects which were unknown only five years ago, such as virtual reality headsets and three-D printers.

Today's speakers are going to show the concrete ways in which our cooperation is taking shape in the new digital landscape, demonstrating its richness and diversity.

Ladies and gentlemen, "Small meets Big" is a reality today in France. In the space of three years, a third of the CAC Forty companies have bought young companies. I can tell those of you who work for companies with a long history that ninety-five percent of French start-ups today want to work with a major group, according to the French Public Investment Bank. Entrepreneurs' agility and boldness combined with the commercial and financial clout *[prononcer : claoute]* of big companies will fuel tomorrow's growth.

I wish you a very pleasant day.