

Speech by H.E. Sylvie Bermann
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom
at the launch of *Goût de France*/Good France
at the French Residence
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Ladies and gentlemen,

An attack on French gastronomy: croissants are now straight! The announcement by Tesco sparked a flood of reactions in both the United Kingdom and France. And yet the croissant – a symbol of French cuisine – actually originated in Austria. But that’s one of the strengths of French cuisine: it reappropriates a certain idea of cookery and good things and spreads it far and wide, including via the French language.

The first of these international events – *Goût de France*, or Good France – was held last year. French embassies hosted some five thousand guests at their residences throughout the world. This is so deeply rooted in our culture that we suggested “The Gastronomic Meal of the French” should be included on UNESCO’s List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity. Our proposal was accepted in twenty-ten because we were able to show that a gastronomic meal, or even a family meal, *à la française*, is about food and socializing. You talk and you eat; you talk about what you eat; and what you eat inspires you to interact even more with the other guests.

If you ask foreigners about their perception of France or why they want to visit our country, it’s obvious that the famous *art de vivre à la française* plays an important role in their choice. Each year, eighty-four million people come and visit France, sustaining more than two million permanent jobs. They come because of our historical heritage, our landscapes, châteaux and museums; but surveys show that more than a third of the visitors come primarily for wine and gastronomy.

Let me remind you that the idea of this event can be traced back to Auguste Escoffier, the famous chef of the beginning of the twentieth century, who in nineteen-twelve launched what he called the *Dîners d'Épicure* (Epicurean Dinners): the same menu, the same day, in several cities across the world, catering for as many diners [*prononcer: dâiners*] as possible. So we could even claim that London is the birthplace of *Goût de France*!

In twenty-fifteen, Alain Ducasse resurrected the idea and suggested it to the then French Foreign Minister, Laurent Fabius. Together they launched this challenge to mobilize as many chefs as possible to serve a French gastronomic menu.

They hoped to enrol a thousand chefs around the world. In the end, one thousand three hundred joined. A total of one thousand five hundred *Goût de France* meals were served that evening, highlighting the chefs' creativity and the pleasure of sharing French food throughout the globe. The world press covered the first event, with more than five thousand articles in a hundred and fifty countries.

Following the success of the first Good France event, it will be held again on the twenty-first of March this year, with a view to making it an annual spring event.

So in each participating restaurant, the event, taking the form of a dinner, will highlight the values French cuisine embodies: sharing, pleasure and a commitment to healthy food and protecting the planet.

It's about getting every category of restaurant, in the four corners of the world, to proudly fly the flag of French cuisine, with strong messages of added value:

- A message of modernity: in the twenty-first century, French cuisine doesn't impose itself hegemonically on the global culinary scene. Participating chefs don't give up their own culinary traditions: instead, we suggest marrying them with French cuisine.
- A message of excellence: vitality, modernity and responsibility. French cuisine becomes a showcase of positive French values, imbued with the warmth associated with the pleasures of the table.

As Alain Ducasse put it, it's "a joyous celebration of French cuisine's vitality", enabling all cultures to engage in dialogue while recognizing their diversity. We want this Good France dinner to be *une fête*, as we say in French: a celebration and a sharing of what is beautiful and good.

Gastronomy has often played a leading role in the negotiation of agreements. I won't go into the famous precedents that have peppered diplomatic relations throughout history (Talleyrand and Fouché at the downfall of Napoleon; Francis the First and Henry the Eighth at The Field of the Cloth of Gold). But a more recent agreement, COP21, reminded us how much hospitality and gastronomy can contribute to the success of negotiations: the meals France provided were praised by the delegations and the press. A *boulangerie* was even set up at the site to supply baguettes and hot croissants (shaped, of course, in the traditional way!).

Talleyrand, who was Foreign Minister and managed to employ the brilliant Antonin Carême, once said: "The diplomat's best assistant is certainly his cook." And I think we must take very seriously the words of another of our chefs, Brillat-Savarin: "The destiny of nations depends on the manner in which they are fed." I think it's important to reflect on that point, because gastronomy is a vehicle for sharing, for exchange, and it can strengthen the ties of friendship uniting France and the UK.

As you probably know, by the end of the eighteenth century, countless French chefs were moving to London – beginning with Louis-Eustache Eude, Louis the Sixteenth's former chef. French cooks opened most of the first restaurants and hotels. And it was seen as very chic to have a French chef or *maitre d'hotel* in the larger restaurants.

It's an honour for me to celebrate French gastronomy for the second time in a country, the United Kingdom, and a city, London, which occupy such an important place in the history of French gastronomy.

Twenty UK restaurants participated in the very first *Goût de France*, on the nineteenth of March last year, joining more than one thousand three hundred participants worldwide. They ranged from local bistros to fine-dining establishments, in London, Yorkshire and Oxfordshire – to name but a few places. The gala dinner organized at the French Residence

brought together many key figures: Matthias Fekl (Minister of State for Foreign Trade, the Promotion of Tourism and French Nationals Abroad), Axelle Lemaire (Minister of State for the Digital Sector), the Duke of Kent, Oxford University Chancellor Lord Patten, French singer Etienne Daho, chef Raymond Blanc and illustrator Posy Simmonds.

This year, eateries around the world were encouraged to apply, proposing menus that showcase France's culinary traditions. An international selection committee of chefs then approved the list of participating chefs.

The chefs on the committee assessed the coherence and quality of the menus proposed by the restaurants which signed up. Chaired by Alain Ducasse, the committee includes some fifteen chefs from around the world.

In the UK, twenty-four chefs have devised special French gourmet menus, which will be served to diners on the twenty-first of March. Menus comprise an appetizer, a starter, a main course, a selection of French cheeses, a dessert, and French wines and champagnes.

A whole range of restaurants are taking part in the event, and the menus are priced at the discretion of restaurants. Menus will be based on fresh, seasonal and local produce, with reduced levels of fat, sugar, salt and protein. Dishes already announced include twice-baked Roquefort soufflé, mussel gratin with Provençale herb crust, *millefeuille* with chestnut cream and mandarin coulis, and baked chocolate tart with roasted plum compote.

I'm very pleased that so many restaurants all over the UK, from London to Cumbernauld, from Suffolk to Scarborough, are joining us on the twenty-first of March in this global celebration of French food and drink. *Goût de France* will provide an exceptional opportunity to savour the dishes of the world's finest gastronomy – from well-loved classics to the boldest innovations and fusion cuisine, which all promote the best of French cuisine today.

A *Goût de France* dinner will also be organized here at the French Residence on the twenty-first of March.

So I'm convinced that, in the words of the great French chef Pierre Gagnaire, "we can make the world a better place through cooking".

I look forward to seeing you on the twenty-first of March!