

Intervention pour ouvrir la table-ronde à la LSE

Distinguished speakers,
Ladies and gentlemen,
Chère Nicolette,

It means a lot to me to say a few words about Maurice Fraser here at his alma mater, which was so dear to his heart. This event shows – as if there were any need – how vividly and fully he is remembered by his friends, colleagues and students, and also how much he inspired us, and will, I am sure, continue to inspire us for decades to come.

Maurice Fraser was a great friend and adviser to successive French ambassadors. He combined an unshakeable intellectual integrity with unfailing courtesy. He would fight his corner in debates, but always attacking his opponents' arguments, never the opponents themselves, and always with a scrupulous regard for the evidence. He had a way of explaining in detail his standpoint on an issue which always earned him our greatest respect.

I learnt very quickly that he was someone to really listen to, as it was he who explained to me, ahead of the British general election, who would win and exactly why... and, of course, he was right!

Maurice was a true gentleman and a complete one-off: very charismatic, thoughtful, mischievous at times and immensely witty. He always seemed to me to have an old-fashioned generosity of spirit and a broad-mindedness that is increasingly rare. His lifelong European commitment and great contribution to Franco-British relations were impressive – and sadly, those qualities are now in short supply, at a crucial time for the UK and the EU.

Among other things, Maurice was a staunch supporter of the Franco-British Council's work, and a member for over fifteen years. Despite his busy life, he was always ready to drop what he was doing, and he provided endless advice and guidance on the right speaker for a seminar, or the most effective approach to potential funders.

I consider it an honour to have known him, albeit briefly, and his passing is a great loss to my French colleagues and to the diplomatic, academic and political communities.

I am now very happy to hand over to our eminent speakers. They will be discussing a philosophy concerned with finding the self and the meaning of life through free will, choice and personal responsibility, a school of thought to which French philosophers are noted for bringing most international attention in the twentieth century. What a fitting choice to honour Maurice's memory!