



Ambassador's Activities

2011

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Speech by *HE* Bernard Emié,
French Ambassador to the United Kingdom

ENA reception at the Foreign & Commonwealth Office

Monday, 16th May 2011

Minister,

Members of Parliament,

Director,

FCO colleagues, fellow alumni and students,

You've gathered here, Minister, British and French former students of ENA in the United Kingdom, alongside students currently on internships in London.

Thank you for this excellent initiative. It is unprecedented. I know how much it owes to the commitment and dynamism of the informal group of British alumni, very effectively led by Hermione Gough and I sincerely pay tribute to them.

What does ENA represent?

In France, it's a key institution. It's the quintessential republican meritocracy that General de Gaulle wanted in 1945, to replenish the governing classes and rebuild France's administrative structures.

But ENA is also the economy, finance and management. A section of today's audience can testify to it: French people in managerial positions in the City and, more broadly, in British companies.

What does ENA represent outside France?

ENA is well known, and sometimes a source of fascination or fear, beyond our borders.

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Not only because it's seen as a symbol of France, not only because it's associated with a quality attributed to the French, Cartesianism – transposed into and applied to the 21st century – but also because it instils expertise, rigour and working methods that our partners can see among the former students they speak to, in civil service, international organizations or businesses. Those qualities are strength. They're also a trademark. Both the French and the foreign alumni are imbued with them. Let me remind you that, in each final year group, a third of the students are foreign – mostly civil servants who devote between a few months and a year-and-a-half to that training.

What does ENA represent for the relationship between the UK and France?

We're in the Entente Cordiale Room, one of the Foreign Office's few rooms without any portraits of Wellington or Nelson! But a century after the Entente Cordiale, the presence today of several intern students – completely immersed in British government departments – is one of the many illustrations of the extraordinary vitality of the bonds and trust between the UK and France.

An average of one ENA student a year is British. That British student alternates between months of study and immersed in the French civil service, at the heart of the State machinery. The British alumni can personally vouch for what they gained from their programmes. The eminent posts they hold in British government departments are testimony enough to the great professional qualities you recognize in them. Those qualities are theirs. But I have no doubt that ENA contributed to shaping and reinforcing them. Thanks to these exchanges, influential Britons also know how the French system works, at the highest State level. The UK and France can therefore better predict or try to predict each other's behaviour. Likewise, young French civil servants have a chance or even the privilege to discover what, for my fellow countrymen, has for centuries been one of the deepest mysteries: how does the British mind work?

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Franco-British relations have never been so dynamic. The closeness of our cooperation on defence is there for all to see. But strengthening our ties requires exchanges and dialogue at all levels of decision-making and in every sphere of influence, in order to improve mutual understanding and achieve consensus. Elected representatives, business leaders, senior civil servants and influential members of civil society can each play their part.

Minister,

By gathering here, alongside ENA students and alumni (and I hope a bilateral association of British ENA alumni could be created), members of the parliamentary friendship group and the Franco-British Council, you've brought together the key players in the relationship between our two countries. You've gathered together, in the spirit of the Entente Cordiale, those who every day, with passion and perseverance, are building a special relationship of our own – close and promising - between two great European States determined to combine and multiply their strength. It's a lasting symbol. I give you my heartfelt thanks for it./.