



Ambassador's Activities

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

Franco-British Symposium on Responsible Innovation

Monday, 23rd May 2011

Ambassador's Residence

Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests,

It's a great pleasure to welcome you to the French Residence today. Over a couple of days last year, the British Residence in Paris, at the initiative of my friend and colleague Peter Westmacott hosted a superb event on nanotechnologies.

I'm delighted now to be hosting, in turn, this two-day bilateral workshop on the highly topical issue of responsible innovation.

The concept of nanotechnologies is closely intertwined with the notion of responsibility – be it responsibility towards the environment or human health – so perhaps it isn't surprising that the idea of bringing together British and French stakeholders to discuss responsible innovation emerged during that workshop.

Professor Richard Owen in particular has been instrumental in helping put together today's event.

First and foremost, I would like to thank our colleagues from the British Embassy in Paris, the Engineering and Physical Sciences Research Council and the Economic and Social Research Council for supporting this event, organised by the French Embassy's Science and Technology Department.

Why concentrate today on innovation? And more specifically, on responsible innovation?

Innovation has been placed at the heart of the Europe 2020 strategy. With an ageing population and strong competitive pressures from globalisation, the

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Innovation Union, one of the seven flagship initiatives of the strategy, aims to improve conditions and access to finance for research and innovation in Europe and ensure that innovative ideas can be turned into products and services that create economic growth, wellbeing and jobs. China, India and Brazil, the so called “emerging countries”, have already begun shaping the world’s economic and political landscapes. To remain competitive and improve quality of life in Europe, we have to focus on improving our ability to turn our research into new and better products and services.

Europe currently spends 0.8% of GDP less than the US and 1.5% less than Japan every year on research and development. Although the EU market is still the largest in the world, it isn’t innovation-friendly enough. What applies at global level also applies nationally. In the aftermath of the recent financial crisis, there has been a wealth of reports explaining how and why innovation should be at the heart of the long term strategy for economic growth, be it in the UK or in France.

But what exactly is innovation?

Innovation is generally understood as the successful introduction of a better thing or method. It’s the ability to transform creative ideas into improved products, services and processes that can compete and stand out in the marketplace, improve quality of life and create growth and jobs. The study of innovation encompasses a variety of fields including economics, business, design, technology, ethics, sociology, science and engineering, and I’m very glad to see representatives of these fields among you here today.

Society seeks innovative goods and services to improve comfort and quality of life. The 20th century – to focus on the not-too-distant past – saw a huge

number of innovations that are now part of our everyday lives. But innovation also has the potential to respond effectively to this century's great challenges. Climate change and global warming, food security and health inequalities are working their way up the international policy agenda. Some of the most pressing challenges for innovation include generating energy from fusion, developing carbon sequestration methods, providing access to clean water, engineering better medicines and making cyberspace more secure. Innovation can have a major impact on society, in both good and bad ways.

For instance:

The Internet. Originally developed for military purposes by the US Pentagon, it is now such an intrinsic part of our lives that the prospect of being denied access to it for any length of time can seem daunting. Yet on the other hand, exchanging information online can be unsafe and open to fraud, and the general public seems increasingly concerned about data security and privacy issues.

Global food security. Those arguing for genetically modified crops believe they're a means of 'feeding the world' through increased production. In many countries, however, the general public is suspicious of Genetically Modified Organisms GMOs, mainly because of their lack of perceived advantages, and because GMO applications to date have seemingly focused on reducing costs for producers without direct benefits to the consumer.

Human health and wellbeing. Stem cell research has tremendous potential. These cells can replace damaged ones and transform themselves into whatever the body needs to regenerate itself. Stem cells could help cure a range of conditions including heart failure, spinal injuries and diabetes. Embryonic stem

cell research nevertheless has huge ethical implications and is a major bone of contention.

Synthetic biology. Synthetic biology, which has been broadly described as the design and construction of novel artificial biological pathways, organisms or devices, has the potential to create bioengineered micro-organisms that can produce pharmaceuticals, break down pollutants, destroy cancer cells, and generate hydrogen for the post-oil economy. Yet opposition by civil society groups has, at times, been fierce.

Nanotechnologies. Nanotechnologies may be able to create new materials and devices with a vast range of applications in medicine, electronics, biomaterials and energy production. Yet nanotechnology raises many of the same issues as any new technology, including concerns about toxicity and environmental impact. Just as there were protests over GMOs 10 years ago, nanotechnologies haven't been accepted by the general public and there was a major outcry in France at the end of 2009.

New technologies exist, and are continuously being developed, which can tackle the major challenges confronting mankind. Each new technology comes with its share of fears and concerns, and we grow increasingly worried about the long-term impact of such new developments. Yet we have to strike a balance between innovation frenzy and innovation phobia. Gaining public acceptance, together with the need to innovate responsibly, are the two main issues to be addressed before new technologies can be used successfully. Governments all over the developed world are continuously investing in their research and innovation base to enhance their economic growth and ensure prosperity. Nowadays, it's the duty of the innovator – be it an individual, a private company, a public body or a government – to help products and services to be

accepted by society. To this end, we haven't just got to innovate responsibly: we also need to keep the public involved, or at least informed.

A workshop on responsible innovation, organised by the European Commission, was held in Brussels last week. Responsible innovation is definitely on the agenda. I propose today that French and British stakeholders exchange, engage and network, in order to:

- define and discuss the scientific, ethical and legal aspects of responsible innovation,
- compare the actions and policies set up in both countries,
- discuss issues of governance, regulation and public engagement with a view to establishing a successful, responsible innovation policy,
- encourage the development of such
- a policy, applicable to research funded by Research Councils/research and development agencies and other bodies,
- in each country.

Progress is made through mutual cooperation and by calling on the expertise of stakeholders from various professional backgrounds (academia, industry, government) and adopting a multidisciplinary approach. Today, each and every one of you brings expertise in many fields: for example, science and technology, sociology, ethics, governance and public engagement.

The aim of this workshop is to stimulate shared dialogue, and I very much hope the next couple of days will nurture future collaboration between our two countries, and that you will find these sessions very productive. I would now like to hand over to Mark Sinclair from the British Embassy in Paris, who is

regional manager for Europe West on the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's Science and Innovation Network.