



# Ambassador's Activities

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

to Cardiff University students

Cardiff, 19 March 2013

[Pro Vice-Chancellor,]  
Professor Gorrara, Head of School,  
Professor Cole,  
Lecturers,  
Students,

*Bore da,*

It's a pleasure for me to be here at Cardiff University today and to meet teaching staff, researchers and students from the Cardiff School of European Languages, Translation Studies and Politics.

I'm delighted to be able to come and speak to this School, chère Professor Gorrara, because I know that a number of you are Francophones and Francophiles. I want to extend my greetings in particular to those students on the Franco-British Cardiff-Bordeaux joint degree course.

Created 11 years ago now by Professor Alistair Cole at Cardiff University and Professor François-Charles Mougel at Bordeaux's Sciences Po, this course symbolizes the success of academic cooperation between our two countries. In a spirit of mutual trust and by being unfailingly proactive, you managed to overcome all the red tape and were able to carry through this wonderful project, which is today a real asset to both establishments. I might also point out that our embassy supported it for the first three years, and I'm delighted to see that it has reached full maturity today.

This France-UK integrated degree programme is a model of Franco-British cooperation, and I'm also pleased that students enrolled on it are getting excellent results and going on to take up prestigious jobs, particularly in major French companies.

This programme has also made it possible to boost links between the two establishments, with the development of Erasmus, and academic staff from Cardiff University working as visiting lecturers and professors in Bordeaux.

The vitality of these exchanges will, I hope, inspire new academic and university partnership initiatives between France and the Britain.

As you know, these are already substantial, fruitful exchanges. There are no fewer than 13,000 French students in the UK, and roughly 2,000 British students in France. For many years, Cardiff University has been establishing contacts with numerous French and other European universities: of Cardiff's 27,000 students, 250 are French, and over a third of them, chère Professor Gorrara, are studying at the School of European Languages, Translation Studies and Politics.

I'd like to see this cooperation developed and broadened, because to a large extent it will shape future links between our two countries and, more generally, all the European Union states. Europe is above all about young people, exchanges, being able to move around. It's a forward-looking project which needs to be constantly reinvented and revamped. Let me talk to you about this Europe.

**I/ The economic situation in Europe and the Euro Area is improving, but remains fragile.**

First of all, a word about the current economic situation in the Euro Area. As France's Economy Minister, Pierre Moscovici, said recently, we're in a paradoxical situation. The major threat which was hanging over the Euro Area's integrity until the end of the second half of the year has been removed: the Euro Area's leaders and its institutions have created the necessary means of keeping their promise to preserve the Euro Area's integrity; the existential crisis is receding; and the doubts about the single currency's future are melting away. It's a major step forward and I welcome it. The stabilization is genuine, even though certain national situations are the focus of collective vigilance. Interest rates have eased in those countries where there was still very great tension in the last six-month period. The countries under programmes are making headway: Ireland, for example, is nearing completion of her programme and Portugal is also on track.

Nevertheless, we're not out of the woods yet. The Euro Area is indeed still in crisis. What concerns us today is the risk of schizophrenic growth, of a scenario where the financial markets recover but the real economy stagnates and remains stuck in a phase of very slow,

almost flat recovery. We'd then have a disconnect between an "economy at the top" and an "economy at the bottom" with, on the one hand, stabilized and even relatively dynamic financial markets, and, on the other, real economic indicators – unemployment rates, consumption, investment etc. – that go in a different direction. Youth unemployment in particular has risen to unacceptable levels, and we've got to tackle it head-on, because it's eroding young people's confidence in the future.

In reality, that's our main collective challenge: to support activity, return to growth and, in a nutshell, establish a positive economic outlook for our citizens, in addition to the effort being asked – which has now lasted for years – and beyond the current stagnation. We can't anticipate another year of recession for the Euro Area without reacting: that would be an economic mistake. We can't go on asking our citizens to make efforts to put our public finances back on a sound footing without opening up the prospect of growth: that would be a political mistake.

## **II/ So Europe must give itself the tools to emerge from the crisis stronger and more effective.**

This is why, for the past year, the European countries – including France, who, since President Hollande's election, has played a major role initiating proposals – have been working to boost economic activity, investment and employment in the EU.

1. The June 2012 European Council agreed on a €120 billion package for growth and employment. This summit was an encouraging development, and we're starting to feel its effects, with the European Investment Bank granting an increased number of loans amounting to around €55 billion, a reallocation of roughly €60 billion worth of structural funds and the forthcoming launch of project bonds.

2. The European Council of February 2013 mapped out the budgetary direction of the EU for the period 2014-2020. Many things have been said about this budget, including that it's an austerity budget drawn up to satisfy demands – particularly British demands – for a smaller-scale EU. In reality it's a budget of consensus and compromise, which finances all the EU's policies until 2020. Let me mention a few of its major points: at France's request, it dedicates €6 billion to young people's employment in the regions where they're hardest-hit by

unemployment; it finances growth and innovation policies to the tune of over €125 billion, through the Europe 2020 strategy; and it ring-fences nearly €32 billion for structural aid to middle-income regions.

3. Finally, the European Union is equipping itself with macro-prudential instruments that will make the financial markets more stable, more secure, and put them at the service of the real economy. I'll briefly mention the creation of banking union, which establishes a single mechanism for supervising all European banks, and the European directive currently being finalized which provides for banks having sufficient own funds to endure shocks like the ones we've been experiencing since 2008. We're also working in our countries to separate retail from private investment banking activities.

### **III/ The crisis has revealed a need for more Europe rather than less Europe.**

What is no doubt lacking in European people's eyes is solidarity. In recent years, we've created discipline – particularly budget discipline – for its own sake, but not sufficiently to ensure the proper functioning of solidarity mechanisms, at a time when this should be its main purpose. Europe is a project of peace, but also a project of solidarity and prosperity.

Most of the EU policies based on this imperative of solidarity work well. I'm thinking of regional policy, which has transformed many European regions, including Wales. In that domain, between 2007 and December 2012, EU projects in Wales created more than 16,000 jobs and almost 4,500 companies, and helped 45,000 people into work and 120,000 to gain qualifications. I'm also thinking of the Common Agricultural Policy, which has supported the income of many farmers, including those in the UK. In particular, Wales has received €378.4 million from the European Agricultural Fund for Rural Development for the 2007-2013 period. Finally, I can mention the Erasmus programme, which you know well here. It must nevertheless be noted that the rise of national egoisms and sometimes, sadly, hints of nationalism help to undermine the common ideal of an ever stronger, more integrated EU.

Today – and it's difficult to say this in the UK – the crisis is linked to a lack of Europe and not to an excess of Europe.

We must nurture a desire for Europe and make people – particularly young people – dream when we talk about Europe. We must prove every day that Europe is the solution to the difficulties all our countries are experiencing, and not their cause. We must also explain that the EU greatly increases its members' influence.

First of all in security and defence. The European countries have realized that they can't act alone and that only cooperation and pooling their strengths can prove effective. The EU's recent civilian and military missions show that, by working jointly, the member states can make their interests prevail, ensure the security of destabilized regions and uphold their values of democracy and freedom. We see this today in Mali, where the European training mission for the Malian army, EUTM, is being deployed, but also in Somalia, where the Atalanta mission is successfully fighting piracy.

The risk of rejection of the EU isn't exclusive to this or that nation. We experienced this in France with the "no" vote in 2005 in the referendum on the Treaty establishing a Constitution for Europe. We can see it today in Italy and Greece. Those people aren't hostile to the European idea, but this lack of solidarity has created knee-jerk reactions of protectionism and isolationism based on identity and has undermined people's commitment to Europe.

#### **IV/ The UK has her full place in a mutually-supportive and integrated Europe.**

The UK hasn't been immune from this temptation to distance herself, even though she has very different reasons for doing so. I had an opportunity to discuss this at length yesterday with First Minister Carwyn Jones, a man who is a profound Euro-optimist.

Let me remind you, in a few words, of the United Kingdom's full place and role in the European Union and the importance France attaches to the UK remaining a strong partner in the EU.

Since 1973, the British have made an outstanding contribution to deepening the single market and to the continent's integration. The UK has played a driving role in trade negotiations, working to make the EU the world's most open regional organization. The UK

also plays a major role in defence. The Franco-British strategic partnership is one of the foundations of this Defence Europe, which nonetheless has trouble asserting itself.

Franco-British defence cooperation, revitalized in 2010 by the Lancaster House defence cooperation treaties, is now a fact of life; our political decision-makers and our armed forces are involved in it on a daily basis. The experience of Libya, where we fought side by side and in harmony, was seminal. Tomorrow, we'll learn the lessons of Mali – the UK was the first to support us in that military operation – and we'll continue making further progress towards pooling our military capabilities.

But beyond our exceptional cooperation on foreign policy, how can we further the European project? And let me remind you of this figure: today, 75% of the resolutions by the Security Council – that global body that shapes the world and peace – are drawn up jointly by France and Britain. So if together we can fully accomplish our mission to ensure peace and international citizenship, through the global vocation of our diplomats, through the values we promote, through our shared vision of the world, how could we not be capable of working fully together for the European Union's future?

That's why, with the respect and friendship France and all her EU partners have for Britain, we're watching with interest and concern the debates taking place here about the future of relations between the UK and the EU. This is a British domestic political issue. You're free to organize, when the time comes, a referendum on EU justice and home affairs policy opt-ins and opt-outs, never to want to join the euro, to remain outside the Schengen Area; it's a matter of your full sovereignty in strict compliance with the treaties.

That's also why, in order to move Europe forward while respecting everyone's sensitivities, we're thinking about a Europe progressing at several speeds, in different groupings. You can talk about a "vanguard", "pioneering states" or a "hard core" – the names don't matter, it's the idea that counts. We must think together about the future coordination of the 17 Euro Area countries and the 27 – soon 28 – EU states.

That's why we're interested in the debate taking place in Britain, and above all it must involve your generation, so that it's not confined to simplified arguments and simplistic and often perhaps even populist slogans.

Most of you grew up amid the peace and prosperity afforded us by the European project. It's up to you to break this worrying silence in the United Kingdom about the EU's achievements and benefits. I'd also like to draw your attention to this striking figure: nearly 150,000 jobs in Wales are a direct result of the contributions of the single market. So it's about your future. Don't let this debate pass you by.

I'll end my speech on this message of confidence. Confidence in the ability of you, the exceptional young people trained in this place of excellence, to show long-term vision for the UK's place in Europe. Confidence that our destiny is shared and that together we'll be able to bring the European idea alive and shape its future.

*Diolch.* Thank you./.