

Speech: PM speech at V&A reception: 18 January 2018

I am delighted to welcome you to the world-famous V&A this evening – a jewel in the crown of Britain’s culture. And now, like so much of Britain, further enriched by a French contribution – with Alice Dietsch as Project Director for the development of the stunning Exhibition Road Quarter which opened last Summer. And I am very pleased that Alice joins us here this evening, together with British architect Amanda Levete, whose practice delivered the whole project.

This evening marks the culmination of the 35th Franco-British Summit.

Traditionally this Summit has focused on our security and defence partnership. And it is right that today we have deepened that partnership further.

And of course we meet in the year that marks a century since the end of the First World War, when our troops fought side-by-side in defence of our shared belief in freedom and resistance against aggression.

And today we stand together against new threats to that same shared belief in freedom. And as I said in my very first speech as Prime Minister in the British Parliament – in the aftermath of the appalling terrorist attack in Nice – “the values of liberté, égalité and fraternité will prevail.”

But tonight is about even more than the defence of our shared values. It is about celebrating those values and the extraordinary depth of the people to people links between our countries.

Here in this Gallery tonight we have partners in business that make up just some of the £71 billion of trade between our countries every year.

Partners in science – from joint space programmes to joint working on genomics in the fight against cancer.

Partners in culture – for example, with your wonderful offer to bring the Bayeux Tapestry to our shores. The first time in almost a thousand years that people right here in Britain will have the opportunity to see a piece of French art that is so important to both our national stories.

Partners in sport – sharing ideas and expertise about major sporting events ahead of the 2023 Rugby World Cup and the 2024 Paris Olympics.

Innovative charity partners like Street League and Sport Dans La Ville – working together to use the power of sport to help young people into jobs and training.

Local partners – with mayors and school leaders who have built links across the Channel, like the new twinnings between Guildford and Versailles, and

Tetbury and Chatillon.

And the leaders of the next generation – including representatives from the young leaders’ programme of the Franco-British Council which launched last year and which I know is looking for new candidates for its second cohort – so please help them find the very best of British and French talent.

All of us are here because we believe in the profound importance of the historic friendship between our countries – and because we want to strengthen it further for the future.

Now as the United Kingdom leaves the European Union, I know there has been some uncertainty about that future and what it might mean for French people living here in Britain.

So let me say this:

En tant que Première Ministre du Royaume-Uni, je suis fière que plus de trois millions de citoyens européens y compris des centaines de milliers de nos amis français aient choisi de faire leur vie et de construire leur foyer ici, dans notre pays. J’attache une grande valeur à votre contribution à notre pays – vous enrichissez tous les secteurs de notre économie, de notre société, de notre culture, de nos vies. Je sais que notre pays serait plus pauvre si vous le quittiez, et je souhaite que vous restiez.

[Translation: As Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, I am proud that more than three million EU citizens [including hundreds of thousands of our French friends] have chosen to make your homes and livelihoods here in our country. I greatly value the depth of the contributions you make – enriching every part of our economy, our society, our culture and our national life. I know our country would be poorer if you left and I want you to stay.]

I know that Emmanuel feels the same about the British community in France.

And we are proud that the agreement we secured at last month’s EU council means that French people living here and Brits living in France can carry on living their lives as before.

But the ambition that we share for the future relationship between the UK and France is so much greater.

So today, more than a century on from the “entente cordiale” let us celebrate our own “entente chaleureuse”.

And let us show just how much this friendship matters to us all – today and for the generations to come.