

EUROPE AND THE UNITED STATES: A TRANSATLANTIC AMBITION

A political speech by Jean-Marc Ayrault

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Europe and the United States, A Transatlantic Ambition

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Dear Friends,

Thank you for welcoming me here to Columbia University and to your School of International and Public Affairs. It is an honor for me to be here this morning. I am aware that I am in an institution of excellence. Columbia's unique relationship with France also attests to this. Many students from your university have come to France as part of their curriculum. We would be happy if even more were to do so. Last night I chaired the launch of a platform called "France Alumni USA," which constitutes a network of former American students in France. I took the opportunity to say that France is truly a welcoming host country for students. We would like to have even more international students, including Americans.

The Maison Française here on campus has been in existence for a century. Your French department is one of the most prestigious in the country, and you have developed remarkable joint programs with the Sorbonne, Ecole Polytechnique and Sciences Po. All of which the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Development actively support. You have called this program "Alliance." Well "Alliance" is a term that I will use as a starting point, perhaps an ideal one, in speaking about the French-American relationship but also of international relations in the early 21st century.

Our world is one of urgent needs. A world that each day becomes more complex, more unstable and also more unpredictable - from North Korea to the Sahel to Afghanistan

and of course the Middle East. People are becoming anxious and sometimes even terrified in the face of war and terrorism. Although when you actually look at it, humanity has progressed in many areas. But changes have occurred so rapidly, and this acceleration and scope bring new challenges that we do not always anticipate.

One example of this is the liberalization of international trade. This liberalization has obviously contributed to the economic development of the Global South. It has contributed to the welfare of industrial societies. But at the same time, it has accelerated widening income inequality here in the United States as well as in Europe. It has weakened the middle class and the underprivileged, with profound implications for our political life. I will come back to this point.

There is also another important change, the incredible connection between people created by the Internet and all the new possibilities enabled by this network. But this change has been accompanied by some malicious uses, namely global cybercrimes.

As for globalization in general, by narrowing the distance between people and accelerating exchanges, it facilitates a great opening up. But it has also overturned the traditional frameworks of political societies. It has fostered parochial identity politics, fears, rejection, an attachment to an often fantasized or idealized past, as well as a desire to turn backward.

And in societies weakened by these changes, there is the sudden, inhuman intrusion of terrorism. You are already familiar with the tragic aftermath of the attacks in recent years in France. Of course, France is far from the only country affected. A few days ago, we all

commemorated the 15th anniversary of the attacks of September 11, which struck the city of New York and plunged the whole world into mourning. Terrorism is here. It strikes everywhere. It hit Boston, San Bernardino, and Orlando. It hit Paris, Nice, and Brussels, but also Istanbul, Kabul, Baghdad, Dhaka, and Abidjan. We are aware of the paradox: The majority of the victims of attacks by these people claiming to act in the name of Islam are in the Muslim world.

But we are also the target of terrorists because of our political systems and our lifestyle. France is not so much a target because it plays an active role, directly or indirectly, in the fight against terrorist armed groups - against Boko Haram, terrorist groups in the Sahel, Daesh in Libya, Syria and Iraq, Al Qaeda in Yemen and elsewhere. But despite what some may think, stopping these campaigns does not guarantee an end to attacks on our soil. France is under attack for what it is, much more than for what it does.

France is truly a land of freedom whose religious rights revolve around the concept of laïcité. I know that this concept is often misunderstood outside our national borders, and the word itself is sometimes difficult to translate into other languages. No doubt we have some work to do in explaining this concept of ours. The concept of laïcité in France is one of the cornerstones of our modern republic. It not only guarantees the secular nature of the state and the administration, but above all it guarantees freedom of religion or belief, including the practice of religion, all religions, without discrimination. That's the foundation. It is an essential principle

which is also widely shared. But what arouses debate is its implementation in the social sphere. It is true that there is a French specificity. And that is why its implementation evolves with society itself. We are faced with new practices, and we must, without denying this foundation, be able to adapt. So, what is the best way to adapt? Well, our judicial system is a guarantee for all citizens, and for freedom. It states the law, and when there is a need for interpretation, it rules, and when it rules, it always rules in favor of freedom for all religions without discrimination. I want to insist on this point. This is the French reality. There should be no misunderstanding.

All of these attacks are accompanied by reactions that could cause divisions and stigma within our societies, and that is one of the risks we must avoid. And that's not true just for France, it applies to all of our democracies. Here too we must remain true to our principles – now more than ever. We must follow the course of reason. And I want to be clear on this point. For us, there is no clash of civilizations.

This mission of ours is one that we must not take lightly, because wherever anxieties flourish, wherever chaos causes social suffering and fear to breed, populists thrive. These demagogues are part of a long political tradition that consists of luring people to their side through simplistic visions and, especially, lies.

Demagogues promise to solve current problems without worrying about the feasibility of their proposals. Without worrying about long-term consequences

or the compatibility of these measures with the values that underpin our societies. Such demagogues show their true colors if and when, by misfortune, they come to power. The people to whom they promised so much end up paying the price for their success. Yes, in the end, populist victories always have a price, and it is the people who pay. And sometimes when the populists are up against a wall, facing the test of responsibility, the demagogues disappear - just like the most fervent supporters of Brexit. Remember who ultimately left the task of implementing this project – whose complexity they had carefully concealed - to someone in favor of Remain.

This crisis of representative democracies exists throughout the world today. In France, demagogues are attacking Europe, the new political scapegoat; they are attacking immigration. They offer illusory remedies. Exit from the European Union. Closing borders. They challenge our fundamental rights on the pretext of more effectively fighting terrorism. I have to tell you that in France and in the rest of the world, we are closely following the U.S. presidential campaign, and we see that the United States has not been spared this sort of populism.

So how do we respond to the challenges of a chaotic and dangerous world, and to various false solutions? Yes, how to respond is the question.

The first imperative is not to panic nor give into the temptation of every man for

himself. During the 2008 financial crisis, we managed to keep our borders open. And if we consider the precedent set by the crisis of the 1930s and the war that followed, that was a major achievement. We must therefore constantly reaffirm the importance of international law. The importance of the values underpinning the United Nations system, particularly human rights. In a turbulent period, it is more important than ever to stay the course and stand by our principles.

In today's world, our foreign and domestic policies must be intelligible and understandable by the people, by our people. We must therefore get closer, to better understand them and be better understood. At the same time, we must not abandon our ethical responsibility. It is the responsibility of men and women who govern and who claim to govern to assume their missions. Our people often express a need for protection. A need for protection from risks and uncertainties. And this is a perfectly legitimate need. It would be wrong to distance ourselves from it or to look down on this need. We have to understand it. But in our search for answers, we must be careful not to choose the path of isolation – the path of those who close borders, build walls to keep out those who are different, consider the Other as a threat, and reject the idea of humanity's shared destiny. Yes, we must never forget that, historically, the fear of others has sometimes led to their negation. If we forget that, then we are indeed making a serious mistake and assuming an enormous responsibility.

The disorders wrought by globalization may make it necessary to rehabilitate

the nation. This need is often expressed and that's not necessarily a bad thing. The nation is a crucial foundation, built on a long history; it is the foundation of a possible world order - and I consider myself a patriot. Americans too are patriots, regardless of their origins. This is not a shortcoming; it is in fact a point of pride and represents an opportunity.

But nations cannot do it all alone. Isolationism is an illusion, as is the illusion of undivided sovereignty. It took the European nations the upheavals of two World Wars, but also - I want to emphasize - the help of the United States for the idea of European integration to finally take shape, with the support of all those who believed in freedom. That is European history. This European history is recent. And it was forged after great tragedies.

Regional organizations and the multilateral system can and must help meet the people's need for protection. This must be reaffirmed, at a time when nationalism might in fact be more fashionable. But do not confuse nationalism with patriotism.

I am in New York for the UN General Assembly. It's true that this organization sometimes disappoints, for example when the Security Council is deadlocked while hundreds of thousands of men, women and children are dying, and millions are suffering. I am thinking particularly of Syria. But at the same time we must not forget the global governance structure offered by the United Nations. I am thinking of its peacekeeping operations, the coordination it provides in matters of

health and food, and the response to climate change that it promotes. The United Nations is the only forum where all countries of the world are represented. But we still face many challenges for which there is no response at the individual level - among them pandemics, regional crises, and climate change. We need this organization despite its flaws.

The second imperative is to continue to act. To act relentlessly. To act even when the solution is not immediately at hand. In the coming months, France will continue its efforts to fight terrorism - to keep pushing back Daesh in Syria, Libya, Africa, and wherever these merchants of death have settled. Working with our allies, with the United States, we will do everything we can to win this war. But we must also prepare to win the peace. By that I mean that political processes, while difficult, are key to restoring stability in these regions. It is not enough to conquer a city and then imagine that everything will be fine. We must build a political project that will be inclusive. And we must not wait, so as not to discover too late that without a political solution, peace cannot prevail. I've just returned from a meeting on Libya, where we have a concrete example of this. Airstrikes, the dictator's death, and chaos. And terrorism is thriving. Each case calls for a collective analysis and a political response.

In the Middle East, France has taken the initiative to restart a process to establish a lasting peace between Israel and Palestine, that is, to put an issue that ends up being forgotten back on the international agenda: the prospect of two

states, Israel and Palestine, living side by side in peace and security. I am all too mindful of the challenge this represents. Should we wait until everything else is resolved to return to the issue that creates so much misery, so much pain, so much hatred, too, and violence? I am convinced of a reality: there will be no peace in the region without a settlement of this conflict, because this conflict fuels violence, feeds resentment and nurtures radicalization. Washington's support for this initiative is obviously crucial.

France is also continuing its diplomatic and military endeavors to contribute to peacekeeping and peace-restoration in crisis regions. In Europe, I am of course referring to Ukraine, within what we call the Normandy format - countries that include France and Germany. On the African continent, I am also thinking of the Lake Chad basin, the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. We have made progress, recently, although many problems still lie ahead.

The third imperative is to strengthen solidarity between peoples. Last year France decided to boost its development aid. This decision means an increase of 4 billion euros more per year by 2020, half of which will be reserved to address climate change. At the national level, as within the European Union - which provides over half of development aid in the world and particularly in Africa - we will be more committed on these issues, which for us are also long-term security issues.

But beyond sustainable development, we also intend to maintain, despite budgetary constraints, our cultural

diplomacy. Not only in French-speaking areas, but worldwide. With rising xenophobia, cultural and human exchanges are more necessary than ever. They truly contribute to better mutual understanding. And by getting to know the Other, the path to isolation ceases to be a temptation.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends, collectively we are not helpless or powerless. There are plenty of examples of our successes, such as the Paris Climate Agreement. I am also thinking of the restoration of peace in Mali, and progress on the ground against Daesh, which I mentioned before.

But other developments are also hopeful. Democracy has finally taken hold in Burma; we must help as much as we can. The peace agreement in Colombia - who would have thought it possible that we could end this civil war that was so terrible and lasted so long? Well, it's the path of negotiation that prevails. It is important to express our support for it. Symbolically, yesterday President Santos of Colombia arrived at the meeting of the Security Council bringing documents that concretize the signing of a peace agreement. So Colombia, like Burma, needs our support. Economic development has also been bearing fruit for several years in India, that huge country, as well as in Bangladesh and in Africa. We have no reason to surrender to pessimism.

So since we have the means to act, and if we want to, what should we do in partnership with the United States in the

months and years to come, particularly after your presidential elections?

First, what I would say is that we have worked really well with President Obama and his administration. We share a lot of progressive convictions. With Secretaries of State Hillary Clinton and John Kerry, we have maintained very close cooperation. We often talk and we often see each other. And we often are together in meetings. That was the case this morning on Libya, it will be the case this afternoon for Syria. Some of our successes are recent and are due to this cooperation. I will give you two examples: the agreement on Iran's nuclear program and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change, that I mentioned already.

Our wish is for the United States to continue maintaining its role in international relations and continuing – in partnership with us - to defend the values and principles we share with respect to peace, democracy, and human rights. I am saying this because I know how this international responsibility is being discussed here in the United States during this election campaign that we are following so carefully. But by defending peace around the world, the United States is actually defending itself. This is something our two nations have long had in common.

We also hope that the United States will remain engaged in a multilateral, collective approach to world problems, an approach that involves discussions at the UN and other global governance fora. It is an approach that contributes to consensus on major common issues,

whether combatting terrorism, fighting climate change, regulating globalization, or bringing peace to conflict zones.

And the European Union, for its part, will remain a central player, a committed member of the transatlantic partnership. I am not underestimating the impact of Brexit, which will weigh most heavily on the UK. But I want to take advantage of this opportunity to give you a recommendation: Don't be too shocked by the British people's decision. Don't let Brexit over-determine your analysis of the situation in Europe. We have overcome other crises. We want formal discussions, negotiations, to begin quickly between London and the other 27 members of the European Union. We have to limit this period of uncertainty; it is bad for everyone. But everyone also wants the negotiations to preserve the interests of both parties as much as possible. And in the case of France, it will maintain a close relationship with the UK in all areas, including defense and security, although within a different kind of relationship to Europe.

Above all, France hopes that the 27-member EU will be stronger than the EU of 28 minus 1. It is a challenge, yes, but in this context, Europe must focus on a number of priorities that reflect the urgent needs of the European people: Protecting the external borders of Europe. Keeping its territory safe from threats. Giving a new impetus to European defense. Doubling the European investment plan for growth by investing in the industries of tomorrow. Achieving greater social justice and tax fairness. Expanding programs for social mobility and youth employment. These

are the priorities that we have set for ourselves. They should help bring about a political consensus and translate into concrete actions that will restore the confidence of European citizens who doubt Europe and its effectiveness. When Europe appears less effective, its people turn away.

But frankly, Europe will remain this extraordinary union of 450 million inhabitants, which is the world's largest economy and the largest development aid donor. Europe, the European Union, will remain a major US partner, including in the economic arena. Indeed, the prospect of a trade partnership agreement is being debated in both Europe and the United States. And yes, there is no question of closing our doors, as I just said. We are not opposed to a partnership agreement on trade and investment. This question remains open; we have done it with Canada, why not with the United States? But there are conditions to be met; negotiations must be balanced and reciprocal concessions must be made to ensure that everyone benefits. It requires true reciprocity. Otherwise, doubt sets in, and it will end up being rejected. Without such reciprocity, there cannot be a transatlantic treaty. I think people will come around, even if it's not easy. But in any case this is our concept, the position that France is expressing in a clear and transparent way. Because the people deserve transparency. It is when such negotiations lack transparency that doubt sets in and prejudices, misunderstandings, and disinformation thrive. We must be mindful of this. And some negotiating methods should also

be changed.

Ladies and Gentlemen, Friends,

Together, we must resist. We must resist fatalism and defeatism. Let's not lose faith as a result of terrorism, or of attempts to create autocracy as an alternative to freedom and democracy, or of the simplistic theories of demagogues. Democracy, human rights, the benefits of a free and open society - these remain the common aspirations of people around the world. Let's be mindful of these things, even though that concept is now being threatened and is in danger. This is what must inspire us: resisting in order to build together. I believe that is our mission. And it is our mission to act together. And you in particular, American young people, who through your studies and exchanges, will, in the future - like your French counterparts - be responsible for exercising your skills in politics, economics, business, government and non-governmental organizations. We are relying on you, but at the same time, you can count on us - that is, on our honesty when it comes to tackling today's challenges without sacrificing who we are: defenders of freedom, democracy and human rights.

Thank you for your attention.





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