

## **Debate on foreign policy in the Senate**

### **Speech of Laurent Fabius, Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Development**

**Paris, 15 October 2015**

President of the Senate,

President Raffarin,

Senators,

Dear friends,

I would first like to thank President Raffarin for holding this debate, the “rapporteurs” who have done a tremendous amount of work and all the speakers for their contributions.

Four main issues were addressed in connection with the four reports of your committee: relations with Russia, Iran’s international role after the nuclear agreement, China’s growth and lastly, the climate.

I’m going to answer, of course, the questions raised about these four points but I hope that you will not hold it against me if I take advantage of this debate to share a wider outlook of our foreign policy because, as you have said yourselves, in a global and interconnected world, everything clearly is related.

Standing at this same podium, President Raffarin summed up the situation very well and I do not want to compromise him by telling him that I agree for the most part with what he said: the notion of independence, what has been said concerning Iran, Russia, the climate, China which he knows extremely well, remarks that were very diplomatic, but we clearly understood their meaning, concerning the position of the United States. Many people sitting in this room share that opinion. I believe that his words reflect acute observation and common sense.

We at times ask what principles have guided our external action since 2012. If I had to choose one, I would say that it is independence. This independence of France, how can it be defined? It is our ability to define freely what we consider to be right and act accordingly. As you all have rightly said, this independence is part of our history and vision that we have of our role in international relations and it contributes to the credibility of our diplomacy. It is a key to our influence. Certainly, and luckily, we have partners, we have friends, we have allies and we care about the solidity of all of these ties, but the world knows and sees that when it comes to major international issues, we make up our minds on the basis of our own judgement and not under the pressure of any protector. In other words and to cite names, not the United States, not Russia, not China, not Gulf countries, not Germany—countries

with which we often have excellent relations—, not anyone. Nothing else but the interest of France and the French people and our vision of the world dictate our choices.

That is where I would have—I might add—a slightly different take on the situation, it is my participation in the Conseil d'Etat then the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and my time spent in the Senate that have led me to such an understatement—from Mr Billout when, with language that is moderate—I must admit—, he speaks of a lack of French ambition, insufficient initiatives when it comes to Syria—which I will speak about later—, unclear proposals, and generally speaking, ambition that is too limited.

Our choices, what are they? In a chaotic world in which we are seeing crisis upon crisis, we refuse what I would call—and nobody here is concerned—weather vane diplomacy that does not know how to set or maintain a course, which is conducted in fits and starts and sometimes with major strikes, that confuses boldness of words with courage in action, a diplomacy that could be embodied in the fine words Georges Danton said to the revolutionary Pierre Victurnien Vergniaud: “He speaks and he thinks that he has acted”. That is why with President Hollande and Prime Minister Valls and under the supervision of the Parliament, we have defined four priorities, dear friends, which in concrete terms determine my action: peace and security, the organisation and preservation of the planet, the revitalisation and re-orientation of Europe, the economic recovery and the outreach of our country. Each time that we have foreign policy decisions to take, this is the compass we use.

First—and obviously, you have addressed what is essential—peace and security. Amid many dangers and crises, France must be a power working for peace and it is. We have shown that—and you have all wanted to point this out—with regard to the Iranian nuclear problem. In the face of proliferation risks, we adopted a position that I would describe as constructive firmness, which—as some of you have already pointed out—has received no criticism from Iranians: yes to an agreement but an agreement that does not allow in definite terms, which means it can be verified, Iran's access to nuclear weapons. This firmness made it possible to reach the robust agreement of 14 July 2015. Throughout negotiations, we have, fully independently and responsibly, defended—because it was our role and our design—the interests of international security and peace.

So, the main question that you have rightly asked is to know whether this agreement can now serve stability, particularly in the Middle East. We hope so but we will judge it on its performance, particularly—and I am using the terms you used and that were perfectly chosen—to check whether Iran is concretely and positively engaged when it comes to several issues: the reconciliation efforts being made in Iraq by Prime Minister al-Abadi, exiting the institutional deadlock in Lebanon, a peaceful solution in Yemen and support for the efforts of Mr Mistura's, the Special Envoy of the United Nations Secretary-General for Syria, to implement the 2012 Geneva Communiqué.

If I sum up our position, which is also, if I understood correctly, your position, the Vienna agreement can pave the way for a safer world. Iran, an important country and great civilisation, must play a full role but everything has not been achieved and we will not judge Iran on the basis of its proclamations, but its actions. I therefore agree with the reports of Mr Legendre and Mr Reiner when they pointed out—in perfect

agreement if I understood correctly— that during President Rohani’s visit to Paris, a road map had to be established—we are working on one and I noted your emphasis on the cultural and educational dimension—, that on the other hand, there was the diplomatic aspect and the aspect of companies and that both should be explored, that the Vienna agreement was positive but we were—in the words of Mr Reiner— waiting to see. That means, in other words, that we needed, in terms of expertise, tourism, chambers of commerce and other aspects, to work together. Therefore, regarding this point, I think that things are clear, and again, nothing divides us.

It is the same commitment to serve peace and security that has determined for now just over three years our position in the Syrian tragedy. I think that it is important to be quite clear because, sometimes, there are interpretations that do not reflect reality. It is a tragedy, a horrendous tragedy and probably the worst tragedy that has occurred this century in terms of numbers if you will. The terrorist atrocities compound the problem of what we must refer to as the barbarity of Mr Bashar al-Assad. The position of French diplomacy—I’m thinking particularly of Mr Billout—is based on several points that I would like to set out.

First, we must fight Daesh and other terrorist groups as collectively as possible. With regard to France, we have been doing this in Iraq for a year, with more than 60 countries, in a coalition that must not relent in its efforts. For some weeks, we have been doing this in Syria, in self-defence, fighting targets that are threatening our own security. What would people say if, having identified targets, which are groups, threatening to kill French and European citizens, we didn’t take action?

All those who want to join us in this fight are welcome provided that—as I said when I spoke at the United Nations—their strikes are effectively directed at terrorists. We condemn those that affect civilians and the courageous moderate opponents who are defending a vision of Syria that we share, in other words a Syria that should be united, democratic and respectful of all communities. Russia has intervened. I have noted that up until now, Russia has only minimally targeted Daesh and terrorist groups and has been focusing on raids on Assad’s opposition. To the extent that—as we have seen in the last few days—with Daesh’s move towards Alep, the move may be linked to the destabilisation of moderate opponents by Russia’s strikes.

Another condition—I set three on France’s behalf—that our country is laying down is stopping the bombing of civilians with explosives known as barrel bombing. These violent acts, which are conducted on the orders—there is no question—of Bashar al-Assad, are the source of most refugee flows and extremism. You asked me for initiatives, we are planning to submit a resolution on this issue to the United Nations. It is a point that is absolutely indisputable.

Lastly, the third element, we want to help foster an extremely difficult and indispensable political transition, which has essentially shown the Syrian people that the person responsible for 80% of the 250,000 deaths in Syria and millions of refugees will not be their future. While I understand the argument put forward by some people, not very extensively here, but one that we are hearing more and more, that Bashar is an antidote to the chaos, I think he is the main one responsible for the chaos. Others say: “But overall, he is a lesser evil compared to Daesh.” And that’s where—and I know we can discuss this subject—, besides being morally wrong, we

consider that allying with Assad would constitute a political gridlock because we have a hard time determining how to move towards a truly united Syria if at some point Bashar al-Assad does not leave power. And if Syrian forces are not unified, including the military ones, it is impossible to effectively fight Daesh and terrorists.

Since 2012, we have advocated and acted in favour of a transition. We know the parameters: the 2012 Geneva Communiqué. We also know who needs to take part. That is where perhaps my communication or your information is not sufficient. We have been discussing this with the United States, of course, who at times seems to be more interested in the Pacific region than in the Middle East or Europe. We have been discussing this with the Europeans, the Arabs, the Turks, with the Russians, with Iranians. We are ready to take action with everyone but under the conditions I just mentioned because we consider that they are the conditions, especially the transition out, that will ensure effective action.

If this debate has allowed me to explain France's position, I am extremely pleased to do so. We know—and that is a point that you have all raised with which I fully agree—in Syria, like in Iraq, like in Mali, like in Libya that first of all, peace is not pacifism and that second, military action, as important as it is, must be accompanied by political advances.

In Iraq, we are supporting reconciliation efforts led by Prime Minister Abadi because we consider that only what we call an inclusive regime and united Iraqi forces will be able to effectively fight Daesh.

In Mali, after our military intervention in 2013, our diplomacy was mobilised to establish the peace and reconciliation agreement that was signed last June and we are now engaged in facilitating its implementation.

In Libya, I consider in hindsight that some degree of error was committed in 2011 to consider—perhaps it was not the idea but it happened—that after military action, follow-up did not have to be conducted. Since 2012, we have supported the diplomatic efforts of the Special Representative of the United Nations Secretary-General, Bernardino Leon, with regard to forming a national unity government.

Therefore, when it comes to Syria, Iraq, Mali or Libya, the lesson is basically the same: in the face of terrorism, if we want to re-establish peace and security, there can be no military solution if there is no political evolution and it is in this direction that we are seeking to take action.

We are also taking action as a power working for peace—several of you showed that—when dealing with the Israeli-Palestinian problem. We are very seriously concerned about the resurgence of violence in the West Bank, Jerusalem and Gaza. For the past several months you have heard me warn against risks of unrest and we were a bit alone. Now we are in the midst of it and we urgently need to resume a credible political process in which we can move towards fair and lasting peace.

This is an initiative of France, which finds itself at times too alone. In national political debate, I sometimes hear that we are told that we do not take enough action on this issue. But you know, when I speak with my foreign partners, they tend to say the

opposite. In any case, we are calling on the international community not to let the two-State solution to disintegrate. We are even warning of the risk that seems remote but may not be that Daesh may even at any given time take on the Palestinian cause, which would have a tragic chain of consequences.

At the recent United Nations General Assembly—and this was not reported by the press—, we held a new type of meeting that responded to our request for an international support group, the Quartet, but this time, enlarged to include key Arab stakeholders as well as European partners. We consider that this format, which we clearly do not wish to stop using and that is new, can help re-create a political future and urge the parties to resume and, we hope, successfully conclude negotiations.

The international support group to which I am referring could set a specific goal of confidence-building measures with immediate objectives to ease tensions: collective support for Palestinian reconciliation and the drafting of international guarantees and compensation that each party will ultimately need in order to sign the hoped-for agreement.

Last November, Ladies and Gentlemen, I said before the National Assembly—and I had the opportunity to repeat before the Senate—that if this last attempt for a negotiated solution is not achieved, then France will shoulder its responsibilities by recognising the Palestinian State. I am once again stating at this podium this commitment. France will not give up the security requirement for Israel or the justice requirement for the Palestinians. I mean, in this regard, that in light of this crisis like with other crises—and concerning this point, very useful things have been said by different speakers—, our diplomacy is not determined by the idea of taking one side against the other. We do not choose the Palestinians versus the Israelis or vice versa. Not anymore than we do in Middle East crises, we would not support the Sunnis versus the Shiites or vice versa. France is the friend of both the Israeli people and the Palestinian people. France does not have to take sides between the two branches of Islam. Our guiding principle—I repeat—, is our concern to act, independence for security and peace.

The position of our foreign policy therefore is intended to be balanced, independent and focused on this peace imperative. It is specifically this imperative that has led us to get involved in recent months in resolving the conflict between Russia and Ukraine. The aim is to break the spiral of war and to create the conditions needed for a return to peace. That is why—in collaboration with our German friends—we have held singular dialogue with Russia and Ukraine within the framework of what is called the “Normandy Format”. Today, we are working to implement effectively the Minsk II Agreement, particularly the political component. The “Normandy Format” Summit held a few days ago in Paris—which I attended—was productive. Despite the fits and starts, compliance with the ceasefire is making progress; the agreement on a small-calibre arms withdrawal is gradually being implemented.

An extremely important point: the elections unilaterally announced by the separatists in the Donbass, which would have meant the end of the Minsk process, were postponed. There is clearly still a lot of work to be done and from experience, we know we must be cautious but we are moving forward, particularly—since I have heard that we do not speak often enough with Russia—thanks to our constant

dialogue with the Russians. Our line with regard to this country—and I am using words that are perfectly justified— is dialogue and a firm stance. A firm stance because we cannot accept violations of international law such as the annexation of Crimea, and dialogue because Russian engagement is part of the solution.

With regard to the Ukraine and other issues, we are working with our key partners to serve security and peace. If I had to—since it is the focus of one of your four reports—sum up our position regarding Russia, to which we are linked by our long history and obvious geographic situation, I would gladly talk of vigilant cooperation. We will continue to speak with the Russians on all issues but without losing our clear-sightedness and compromising our principles. Here again, I agree with the words of Mr del Picchia, Ms Durrieu and all those who have addressed these issues. Mr del Picchia told us: “France must now say that it would like to see a gradual lifting of sanctions”. But we are saying that! But I am saying that on this podium! Provided that the conditions are met, of course. It is not a good idea to maintain sanctions indefinitely; that would not make sense. That would penalise the Russians and that would penalise us. The other suggestions that were made of course warrant examination.

With regard to this first priority of our foreign policy, peace and security, I would like to say a few words but I was perhaps expecting that here in the Senate things would be addressed in a critical manner; they were not. I am also speaking about the National Assembly perhaps. Sometimes we have heard criticism with regard to human rights. I’d like to take a few moments to address that criticism. It fails to consider the mobilisation of our diplomatic network in all the multilateral forums where these rights are defended, and in particular a cause which I have made a cornerstone of our diplomacy: the universal abolition of the death penalty. This criticism ignores our efforts to assist in a number of individual cases, far from the cameras and microphones, because I have come to believe with time that most often this is required if we are to be effective. Those people who have criticised us are also unaware of our strong positions in favour of the rule of law, for example—a few minutes ago, I met with the Tunisian Nobel Prize laureate—our support for the Tunisian democratic transition. Not to mention that fighting for human rights does not just mean participating in essential protests against an individual situation of a particular regime, but it is also the unwavering commitment I just described to peace and security, because war and chaos are the leading sources of violations of human rights. Through our diplomatic efforts, and sometimes through our military interventions, we are protecting the right of populations to live in security and peace. It is therefore our number one priority, security and peace.

Our second foreign policy priority is the organisation of our planet and its preservation. In terms of the organisation of the planet, this means promoting a better internationally-regulated society, hence our unwavering support for the UN. The need to reform the UN has been invoked: we are in full agreement. Seventy years after its founding, there are shortcomings, but, despite everything, the UN is a unique forum, where the international community strives to resolve crises, uphold human rights and agree on a shared vision of the planet's development and future. We believe in the UN, despite all its limitations. We advocate reforms to make it more representative and more effective. We would like to enlarge the permanent membership of the Security Council to give a greater role to the emerging countries. Our proposal, which

has been criticised—unjustly in my view—, is that the five permanent members of the Security Council, when dealing with mass murder, as is the case in Syria, voluntarily suspend the use of their veto to prevent the Council from being paralysed. In our view, the veto is not a privilege; it is a responsibility. You no doubt noted that the French President, speaking at the recent United Nations General Assembly, made a commitment that France will no longer use its veto in such cases. This is a major decision, but it cannot be criticised as a renouncement of our role. Not at all! I even think, somewhat paradoxically, that if we want to imbue the veto with its full legitimacy, we need to avoid excesses, like the ones we have seen in the Syrian affair. Our decision was made to serve the cause of international security, peace and a renewed and legitimised multilateralism.

We are also working to preserve the planet. Ms Giraud, Ms Aïchi and Mr Perrin spoke about this and I have noted their remarks. I would like to thank them and I agree with what they say. Ms Aïchi stressed how she could not do anything in this area without a long-term vision; Mr Perrin raised a whole series of perfectly legitimate questions about the impact of climate disruption on conflicts, migration, extreme weather events and poverty. That is the point. Ms Giraud was willing to say that I was taking action for the climate. Yes, I am, Mr President, so much so that, even though there is no competition of any kind, my foreign colleagues have given me the nickname of “Clima-rathonian”, a pun, which cannot be translated into French. We are taking action to preserve the planet, which is the topic of the world conference, which I suggest we call the Paris Conference, not out of arrogance, but because that is what everyone else is calling it. When they talk about it amongst themselves, they do not call it COP21; they call it the Paris Conference and so we might as well do it too.

Fifty days. Do you remember why we bid to host the conference? Because the history of international climate conferences is one long series of triumphs? No, that was not the case. We did it because the President of the Republic, who made the decision, considered that the conference was vital, in the etymological sense of the term, and that France should shoulder its responsibilities. I want to take the opportunity of your discussion of climate issues today, just weeks before the Paris Conference, to tell you what I see as the requirements for success. I see at least three main requirements. First, the agreement must be an ambitious one, which means an agreement that restricts global warming to 2 degrees by 2100, or, if possible, to 1.5 degrees. In recent weeks, those of you who have been following the issue closely will have noticed some progress, particularly in terms of the number of “national contributions” being submitted. To date, nearly one hundred and fifty countries have submitted this document, which defines their commitments, to the UN. This is an absolutely new development. The contributions account for nearly 90% of emissions, whereas—keep this number in mind—the famed Kyoto Protocol now covers only 15%. The difference is enormous.

Based on the contributions announced, some preliminary estimates have been made. The official estimate will be released on 1 November, but the early estimates by NGOs and others show that we are on track for 2.7 degrees according to some and for 3 degrees according to others. This is certainly less than the 4, 5 or 6 degrees under the IPCC's catastrophic business-as-usual scenario, but it is obviously still too much. Therefore, as we found in advance of the conference, it is absolutely

critical to adopt a periodic review clause to increase national commitments, for example every five years, in order to improve the path, which must stay below 2 degrees. In my view, this is one of the key requirements for success. I do not know if I made myself clear, but we must have this review clause.

The second requirement for success in Paris, which we do not hear enough about, is that the agreement must be legally binding. The point is not to adopt merely a policy statement. Today, since next week and the week after that we are holding formal and informal talks, the binding rules that we must include in the agreement need to be clear. We are also working to strengthen the system for monitoring commitments. The exact legal form of the system has yet to be defined as we speak today. The agreement must have the force of law and, in certain countries, such as the United States, this must not lead to automatic blocking of ratification. This is no easy task. The fact that the agreement is a universal agreement should be a helpful constraint. Indeed, the fact that all countries are parties to the agreement could be the greatest deterrent to violations.

Finally, the third requirement, in my view, is that we must ensure that the agreement is backed up by the financial and technological resources needed for its implementation. As you may remember, back in Copenhagen in 2009, the Northern countries promised to devote a hundred billion dollars to climate issues in the Southern countries each year in 2020. This promise must be kept, because it is the key to solidarity and fairness, which are the two prerequisites for reaching an agreement in Paris. In recent days, as you know, we were in Lima, Peru for the Annual Meetings of the IMF and the World Bank. I was there with my colleague Michel Sapin and, in a major step forward, we obtained, at our request and the request of Peru, a precise progress report. Up until now, as I noted when I first looked into the matter, I had been told that we had to reach the objective of one hundred billion dollars in 2020, but nobody was able to say where things stand today. I did not see how we could have moved forward. In a very comprehensive, technical and methodical report, the OECD estimated the financing provided to the Southern countries for climate issues in 2014 at seventy billion dollars. Unfortunately, not enough of this financing went to adapting to the impact of climate change.

In Lima, the multilateral banks promised to make a further effort, adding fifteen billion dollars to their current financing. If we include the new efforts of certain governments and upcoming private sector investment, it should now be possible to reach the one hundred billion mark and that would be a major boost for the success of the Paris Conference. Efforts are being made on the technology front, which is critical, particularly for Southern countries, including major emerging countries, such as India. More about these efforts will be unveiled at the Paris Conference, such as the work we are doing with Bill Gates and others to increase research and development budgets, and public-sector and private-sector investment in renewable energy sources.

Things are moving ahead and they look promising, but much remains to be done. If we achieve these three results: an ambitious and legally binding agreement backed up by financial and technological resources, if we also make progress on carbon pricing, which will not be legally binding, but which should accompany the COP, and on the ambitions for 2050, because if we want private sector involvement, we must

have a long-term vision (I am echoing what Ms Aïchi said), and if we have rapid and practical measures, such as a major programme to light up Africa, which various leaders are working on, including the man who has been given this task, the new President of the African Development Bank, a remarkable man who was formerly Nigeria's Minister of Agriculture, if we achieve all of this, then we can talk about success on 11 December, the closing day of the conference.

The President of the French Republic is at the forefront, along with the whole government, our diplomatic network and myself. I have performed my task as the future President of the conference to contribute to its success. I was on the road recently, in South America, then in Saudi Arabia to talk about the climate as well. In early November, I will call a meeting of ministers from some one hundred countries for an informal pre-COP session, since our conclusion from the previous conferences is that you have to make as much progress as possible before the conference is actually held. It is very difficult to make progress on all issues when there are twenty thousand delegates and twenty thousand guests. Therefore, in this final stretch, we will really double our efforts, which is arduous, but I think necessary, to achieve success on what could be the greatest diplomatic achievement in the world in recent years.

Your climate report lays great emphasis on rising sea levels as a factor for geopolitical disruption, particularly with regard to climate refugees. I think you are right and I am constantly raising the alert about this point, stressing that climate disruption is also a security disruption. Therefore, the Paris Conference, as it must be presented, will not just be an environmental conference; it will also be a peace conference.

The third priority is the European issue. Once again, every thing is tied together. There has been a series of crises, as you are aware. Today, in addition to all of the previous crises, we have a humanitarian crisis, with waves of refugees fleeing conflicts in the immediate vicinity of the European Union. I would add that there is sometimes a democracy crisis in domestic public opinion. Europeans undoubtedly still believe in a certain idea of Europe, but they now associate the workings of the European Union with a lot of red-tape, unemployment, social dumping. This creates a context that promotes tensions between Member States, nations turning in on themselves and populist rhetoric that plays on people's fears. You know all of this as well as I do.

Under the circumstances, we must act on the clearest possible principles. These principles have been defined as solidarity, responsibility and firmness. This was the theme of a whole series of speeches by the President of the Republic, who sometimes spoke alone and sometimes with others, including Chancellor Merkel on occasion. The priority today in this regard is responding to crises, since there are great risks of disunity. There are the risks arising from the migrant crisis. There are the potential risks from the British referendum, which I warned about, since it is an extremely risky business, if I may say so. The responsibility of the Member States, especially France, as a founding country, is to provide responses to all these issues (migrant crisis, possible and practical progress) around some guiding ideas. We need to simplify the EU, but, in my opinion, not promote the illusion that the treaties could be revised in the short term, given the states of mind in our countries. We must start

by improving the economic and social situation, and then we can amend the treaties. Similarly, we need to protect ourselves better, not only against the terrorist threat, but also through European defence and other operations.

And then there is the straightforward matter of developing the European economy so that it can meet the challenges of today and tomorrow. This calls for bold policies in several key areas: energy, climate, digital technology, tax and social equity, etc. All of this requires greater convergence of European economies, especially in the euro area. In the coming weeks, there will be a whole series of debates about the way ahead for Europe, as the British referendum approaches and Mr Cameron's government makes its proposals.

Naturally, we shall examine these proposals with our partners and with a simple principle in mind: yes to improving the Union, but no to undoing it. As I told our British friends, and I hope that there is agreement here on all sides, that for France, the United Kingdom's place is in the European Union, as long as the Union remains true to its founding principles and it does not have to renounce its ambitions.

We are working together with all of our partners on all of these European issues, and of course that means primarily with our German partner. Our visions or our interests may sometimes diverge, but in such cases, we naturally uphold our own point of view. Fortunately, in most cases, we adopt a common position, which is a powerful tool for action.

The last priority for our foreign policy is France's soft power. You have already discussed economic diplomacy; we shall not go into that again. It is now one of the settled priorities of diplomacy for the reasons that I had an opportunity to discuss in Commission yesterday. I am reminded of the words spoken, I think, by President Raffarin: "Political influence cannot be disconnected from economic clout for any length of time." Therefore, with the support of the President of the Republic and the Prime Minister, we have embarked upon a whole series of reforms: internal reorganisation of ministries, instructions to our ambassadors, alliances with business, especially small and medium-sized enterprises, special representatives in strategic countries, stronger links with those countries, extending the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' remit to foreign trade and tourism, creating new unified agencies—Business France, Expertise France—, worldwide campaigns to promote our country, such as the "Creative France" campaign. These reforms are now starting to produce results, but we must persevere, because we still have much to accomplish.

Some people say, but not in the case of the Senate, that economic diplomacy will lead us to stop defending our values. I do not buy this argument at all. If I wanted to make you smile, I would counter those, outside the Senate, who like this argument, by quoting something François Mitterrand often said. He was well aware of the foibles of the human mind and he would often say to me, thinking of others: "We must not think that all of the flies buzzing around are ideas." That is true. In most cases, defending our economic interests is in no way incompatible with promoting our values. Furthermore, maintaining economic relations with a country obviously does not mean giving its government a blank cheque for each of its domestic policies. I think what Ms Goulet and others said is perfectly reasonable. Let's stop "bashing",

whether its “French bashing” or other kinds of “bashing”, when there is no justification for it.

And, when the situation requires it, we are able to draw the line on economic diplomacy and make hard choices, as we did, for example, when we decided not to deliver the Mistral ships to Russia. Some people, whose reasoning I find hard to follow, interpreted this move as an attack on the Russians. I have a hard time understanding why the Russians would have been willing to rescind the contract with us if it was not in their interest. But, of course, as we all know, dialectics sometimes manage to overwhelm even the soundest reasoning. We have also found another buyer for the ships.

At this point in my remarks, I would like to say a few words about China, since the report, the very interesting report, deals with China. Our relations with this giant, which was a giant yesterday, is a giant today and will be a giant tomorrow, are excellent. Your report rightly stresses the fact that China’s new growth model will have a major impact on our economic relations. As the two-digit annual growth rate of a few years ago gives way to a 7% official growth target for 2015, the Chinese authorities have acknowledged that major changes are under way in their economy. Our periodic discussions with these authorities have shown that they were expecting this shift to what the Chinese President calls the new normal. Simply put, China is shifting from economic growth driven by exports and investment to a model that relies more on domestic consumption.

This is good news for China, despite the appearances, since the previous model resulted in speculative swings on the stock markets, which do not have the same impact there as they do here. The Chinese stock market does not finance businesses. That role is played primarily by banks, but there are systemic risks, as we saw during the summer. China’s evolution is also good news for the world, even though I told the highest Chinese authorities that the explanations they provided were without a doubt not exactly the ones that they should have given because, as was expected, the so-called markets considered the change to be a complete break with the previous model.

China’s frenetic growth has resulted in environmental damage, in terms of pollution and depletion of global natural resources. This new normal represents a historic challenge for China, which will need to rethink whole sections of its economy in the coming years and develop a greener industrial sector. This has been taken on board. It is no coincidence that, in just a few days, the Fifth Plenum of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China, to be held from 26 to 28 October, will stress the need to continue structural reforms. Government-owned enterprises, which account for 50% of China's GDP, will be particularly concerned. In this situation, which the report authors have analysed so well, we should make the most of our relations, especially the upcoming visit of the French President to China, where the main topics will be sustainable development, expanding our relations and preparations for the Paris Conference.

The President will travel with representatives of large manufacturing groups and small businesses. He will travel outside the capital, which is a wish of the Chinese authorities, and we will forge new partnerships according to the road map, including

partnerships on third markets, as several of you have wished. Other sectors could of course benefit from the authorities' renewed interest in the needs of Chinese consumers, not only in the traditional sector, but in agriculture, food, pharmaceuticals and, naturally, new technology. One of our priorities is to be present in the new Chinese economy. In doing so, France, after betting on China before others did and completely independently, will play its role in supporting China in its economic emergence.

Several results have already been achieved. I hope they will continue. They have yet to be perceived by the general population. Despite China's slower growth, and more especially, the sharp contraction of China's imports, which slid by 15% in the first half of the year, French companies posted sales growth of 14% in the first half of 2015. I think this shows the positive contribution of new areas of cooperation, which are a response to the needs of a middle class made up of five hundred million people. Also, I think our entrepreneurs have understood how to take a better approach to the decisive change in the Chinese economy. It is now up to us to continue taking political, economic and administrative action to support them in this endeavour.

President Raffarin, you often emphasise how the quality of our economic relations with China can be explained more particularly by the independence of our foreign policy. I fully agree with this view. I said at the start of my remarks that our independence is the key to our influence, and not just our diplomatic action, but our economic influence as well, as can be seen with China and with other countries. Moving beyond this economic dimension, and then I will wind this up, I would like our diplomacy to reach into all areas of the government's external action: culture, education, language, values, francophonie--with seven hundred and fifty million French-speakers, in a few decades, as Africa grows, and the reservoir of economic influence that it represents--, tourism, which is a national treasure for our economy and for our image in the world--, and I said it yesterday in Commission, but I want to say it again to get it on the official record, we must get used to a simple idea that is seldom presented as such, unfortunately.

When we look to see what the largest sectors are in France's economy, which sector provides two million jobs that cannot be moved offshore and 7.5% of our gross domestic product? In which sector does France rank first in the world? Which sector generates much more than ten billion in trade surpluses and which sector do we know will grow in the future? The answer is tourism. Therefore, we must stop thinking of it as a marginal sector. It is a key sector for our development and our international influence. This is the reasoning behind the very important announcements recently made by the managers of the Caisse des dépôts, whom I would like to thank, when they agreed to an investment of more than one billion euros in the tourism sector in the very near future. In short, my constant concern is to conduct diplomacy worldwide, with financial resources that are limited, of course, but which make progress possible nonetheless. Since France's influence in the world takes many forms, our diplomacy must do the same.

I promised that I would send each of you a copy of the "MAEDI 21" project that we drew up a few weeks ago. The project considers the organisational implications of all of these issues for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in the coming years. A whole series of reforms is planned and, since we were talking about China, there is one

development that is both symbolic and real. In 2025, 25% of our diplomatic staff will be located in the emerging G20 countries, and in 2017, which is two years from now, our largest embassy in the world will be our embassy in China. At the same time, we will develop co-located embassies with our European partners; we will strengthen the security plans for our expatriate community; we will assign--and you are concerned by this one--a diplomatic adviser to each Region Prefect to strengthen the ties between our diplomacy and our local governments; we will set up online consulates so that by 2020, all French citizens living abroad will be able to conduct all of their consular business online at any time of the day or night. Also in 2020, our Ministry building will be completely carbon neutral. These are a few examples of decisions where organisational measures are inline with the general outlook.

Ladies and gentlemen, Mr President, first let me apologise if I have taken too long, but there are not many opportunities to present a broad overview that is coherent as well. I have summed up the four priorities of our diplomacy. I would like to say, in your name and in the name of my staff, that these priorities are served by an extremely competent administration and I would like to take this opportunity to express, I was going to say my gratitude, but as I know you, I will say our gratitude. We must not be arrogant. France alone obviously does not tell all of the governments in the world how to behave, but everywhere I go, I see that, as the expression that has already been used says, our voice is expected and heard.

I think I can say that our diplomacy holds its own on all of the issues that I have just mentioned. Furthermore, it seems that a majority of French citizens see it this way and feel satisfaction and sometimes even some pride in it. And yet, we need to be clear-sighted. France has many strengths, but the spontaneous developments of the twenty-first century are not all working in our favour. Our demographic and economic clout is bound to decrease in relative terms. Competition with emerging countries will heat up. Europe is facing and will face substantial challenges, starting with its divisive tendencies. Acknowledging this should not discourage us in any way. It should spur us to step up our efforts by reconciling--I am thinking of what Ms Aïchi said--managing the short term and its immediate crises and preparing for the long term, ten or twenty years into the future. In this mission, I know that I can count on action by legislators, particularly the senators. You have supported our action and you have generally done us the honour of giving us you support and trust.

I thank you for your important contribution to the quality of our foreign policy, because beyond the partisan divisions, there is in all simplicity this precious thing which we call France's interest. I know that each and every one of you are the defenders of that interest. Thank you.