Australia and France:

A new partnership for the 21st century

How am I to compete today?

The regular speakers here at the National Press Club are politicians – trained to attract and retain their audience. Ladies and Gentlemen, I confess I am a diplomat: being boring is an essential skill we are supposed to master throughout our career. According to David Lloyd George: "Diplomats were invented simply to waste time."

Today I’ll have to avoid that, steering clear of the chosen art of diplomacy - ambiguity. You certainly know the rules of my profession: Yes means Maybe, Maybe means No. And the one who says No? He is no diplomat.

Today I will need to be clear.

And stick to the schedule, not to keep you all from your dinner. As the wife of a famous ambassador told him, “Remember Darling, for a speech to be immortal, it should not be eternal.”

Are nations immortal, or at least eternal? Probably not.

But, Australia and France, we share something that is truly rare: we believe that a nation is founded on values, and that anyone who wants to share these values, wherever he comes from, whatever the languages he speaks, his religion, his forebears, can become fully part of such a nation.

Over the centuries, very often through interactions and confrontations with other communities, history forges values.

Encounters play a key role in the narratives that shape nations.
It has in that sense a lot of similarity with our personal lives.

Remarkable encounters are never forgotten.

For France, our fascination for Australia has always been deeper than the oceans between us.

In the case of Australia, there was never a tyranny of distance when it was about fighting tyranny in France.

My message today is that Australia and France share a special, and in a way unique relationship, and with this foundation comes an opportunity. To build a new partnership, moving forward to face the challenges of the twenty first century and beyond.

One century ago, in the muddy trenches of the Somme, our two nations forever blended their blood and their fate.

Believe me: French people are fully aware that the survival of our old nation is due to the sacrifice of a nation that was about to be born.

Nobody has forgotten that the encounter of France and Australia was between three hundred thousand Australians alongside their French brothers. Of your diggers, one in two was wounded in action, and one in six lays buried in our fields.

As the President of the Republic said last year at the Australian War Memorial: the Unknown Soldier is the son of Australia and France, because he was born in Australia and died in France, for the liberty of our two nations.

One century ago, months and years went by. An atrocious war seemed like it would never come to an end.
There was Pozières, Fromelles, Bullecourt, then Ypres. The Somme and then Flanders.

Your Diggers and our poilus, facing adversity together.

They were my great grandfathers, and they were yours.

Almost four years. Always the same trenches, always the same assaults, the never ending pounding of artillery. The non existant future that looked like death.

During the spring 1918, destiny was unsure: the eastern front crumbled after the Bolshevik Revolution. With an additional 50 divisions, the enemy led their army towards a new assault on Paris.

The first target was the city of Amiens, only 120 km from our capital.

Seizing Amiens meant breaking the link between the French and British armies… and probably also the political solidarity between the allies.

Seize Amiens, and the road to Paris was wide open.

At the end of April, the attack was formidable. The British Army retreated under the onslaught and the enemy entered Villers-Bretonneux, the last bastion before Amiens.

Paris was holding its breath.

In the night of 24 to 25 April, under the orders of Generals Glasgow and Elliott, two Australian brigades moved into action under extremely difficult circumstances.

Suffering heavy losses, but without ever wavering, they surprised the Germans and took the town back.

Général Foch, then Commander in Chief of the allied armies would tell them: ‘the courage of the Australians has been an example for the whole world. You saved
Amiens and you saved France. Our gratitude towards you and towards Australia will be eternal.’

Hope changed sides. The last act of the Great War was about to begin.

When the time for the offensive came, the Australians spearheaded the allied armies to victory.

But a mere generation later, the Australians were back, on D Day, to liberate my country after 4 years of a dreadful occupation.

I am a son of Normandy.

And so many times my grand-father, a navy officer, recalled the Landings under heavy fire from German artillery.

He would never fail to mention the courage and effectiveness of Australian airmen, to whom he owed his survival.

It’s been a great honour, to have awarded the highest distinction of the Republic, the Legion d’Honneur, to a number of these veterans.

In each of them I have seen the living proof of our liberty. To each of them I’ve tried to express our never ending gratitude.

For, without their sacrifice, I would certainly not be here, in front of you. You, their descendants.

Long before that, Australia and France had quite a few more gracious encounters.

They could indeed have changed the path of our history, not only culinary.

Can you imagine that on the 24th of January 1788, two days before Captain Phillip was to set up his camp in Sydney Cove, two French vessels showed up in Botany bay.
They were not at all expected.

And not much welcome, as France had been at war with Britain for almost 50 years, during that century.

But La Pérouse was not the Vanguard of an invading fleet. He had in mind what he had written before leaving France:

"I shall make every effort to ensure that the inhabitants of the Islands we might visit will never be sorry for having welcomed us".

So he did, in what became the very first encounter between France and Australia.

Only a few years later, France and the world had changed dramatically.

The King who had sent Lapérouse all over the globe, who had given a decisive hand to the insurgents in America, and helped create a Republic in the heart of the new world,

This man was arrested, jailed, tried and decapitated in Paris, asking with his last words if anybody had any news from Lapérouse.

Anyway, when Baudin and Flinders met, at Encounter bay, in April 1802, that second encounter between France and Australia was again a friendly one.

Indeed, only a few days earlier, a peace treaty had been signed between France and the UK.

Baudin himself, his crew, the many scientists that were on board, were absolutely fascinated by Terra Australis.

They drew thousands of sketches of an amazing country and of its indigenous people. They brought back 180,000 samples of flora and fauna, and many live animals that would be offered to the Empress, spouse of Napoleon.
Today, gratitude, friendship and fascination for your country are more than ever the very strong drivers of our relationship, in this new century.

For a very many young French, scientists, businessmen, artists, Chefs, and of course diplomats, Australia has become the place to be, the place to start a new life.

Here, we find a nation that looks to the future with confidence, a nation which is, in many ways, a model in terms of human development, economic achievements, and a successful melting pot.

But I sometimes wonder what France represents today for Australians?

II. Creative France, beyond the clichés.

Each year, my country welcomes over one million Australian visitors.

You come to France and of course wish to discover and enjoy our history and our art de vivre.

You contribute to making France the number one tourist destination in the world with 85 Million visitors in 2014.

You are great lovers of French cuisine, of our wines which – even if we drink a lot of them - have kept their first export ranking in value despite fierce competition.

You appreciate that our luxury goods industry has managed not to reneg on its tradition and craft, while developing major companies around brands like Vuitton, Dior, Hermès, Chanel, Hennessy, Mumm – which everywhere in the world have become symbols of quality and refinement.

And you are of course true amateurs of the very lively French culture.
In permanent dialogue with the rest of the world, through our writers, artists, and our film industry, the second largest exporter after Hollywood. Just think about the French film Festival in Australia!

But when you come back from France, or when you talk about France, are you always aware that beyond and in good harmony with this tradition, innovation is at the heart of our nation, and it is our project for the future?

You may not remember that 35 years ago, we built the first european high speed train network and even connected Great Britain to the continent with the Eurostar? And one day, perhaps, Canberra to the major cities of the east coast…

That in creating Airbus, we gave birth to an aeronautic company which now successfully competes with Boeing around the world. Just think about the iconic Qantas A380! And more new planes to come, in the next years.

That, possibly inspired by the Eiffel tower, Arianespace and our Space launch complex have become the world’s safest satellite launchers. Just last month, they successfully put the first NBN satellite into orbit. No less than 200,000 Australians will get fast internet thanks to this!

That our nuclear industry, with 50 years of incident free operation and constant upgrading, nowadays provides 80 % of the power used by the French, at half the cost of Germany’s power. And exports to many of our European partners and to China.

As underlined by PM Turnbull in his first statements, innovation is key for the future of developed economies.
One aspect of the French paradox is that our way of life, and Bordeaux wines probably, go together very well with Science, as France keeps the record in FIELDS medals in Europe and was awarded no less than 9 Nobel prizes in the last ten years.

Similarly, tomorrow evening, a french Australian working at the UNSW will be awarded the prestigious Prime minister’s prize for Science in innovation. I will let the Pm tell you more about him in due time.

All this explains why France is becoming a hub for new technologies.

Any examples?

Facebook, Intel, Cisco, SalesForce, Huawei and Samsung recently announced unique projects for Europe to be launched in France.

And the world’s largest start up business incubator will open in 2017. Where? In Paris naturally.

This however has not made us immune from circumstance. Just like Australia, France weathered the GFC thanks to a solid banking sector, but as an open economy, the ongoing repercussions of the crisis can still be felt today.

Despite this, our confidence in the future has never deserted us. With one of the highest birth rates in Europe (2 children per woman on average, to compare with 1.4 for Germany and Italy), we maintain the ability to grow our population into the new century.

A creative country in the industrial space … and, if I may say so, in the family space, France never gave up at the international level either. This is another aspect that brings Australia and France closer together.
As a permanent member of the UNSC, we see the world with lucidity and shoulder our responsibility.

Lucidity leads us to find that the world has never been this unstable and dangerous.

As children of the bipolar world of the cold war, we hoped that it would be rebuilt as a tempered multipolar world in this new century.

Using the words of our minister for foreign affairs, we nevertheless need to face the fact, that it’s definitely zero polar, namely that it’s chaotic and unpredictable.

In this context, taking responsibility means first and foremost being true to alliances, and to the values we share with our allies.

For France, this firstly entails the reinforcement of Europe, and the maintenance of effective and friendly Franco-German relations.

Who could have predicted that together we have kept Europe going since 1957.

More recently, hand in hand, Chancellor Merkel and Président Hollande have been faced with serious crises in Greece, Ukraine or with refugees. Let me remind you, that in resolving these, French and German leadership has consistently been key.

Beyond this, our commitment to NATO has been ongoing, and we fully re-integrated it’s military command structure in 2009.

History however has taught us that even when we can count on our allies, sovereignty is primarily a matter we must be ready to address ourselves.

In this spirit, the Latin maxim “Si Vis Pacem Para bellum” takes on new meaning. We must invest in security to protect peace. Just like Australia, France stands by its values, acting to prevent their infringement.
For this reason, France as a nation has always maintained and upgraded an effective
deterrence doctrine, based on our nuclear military capacity – the use of which rests
exclusively with the President of our Republic.

For this reason, we have always **ensured** that our defense industry would keep its
capacity to innovate as well as its independence.

Nowadays, this industry and its global companies like Dassault, Thalès, DCNS, Airbus – secures France’s autonomy and effectiveness.

It is a very successful exporter, ranked 3rd in 2014. And this does not prevent highly
ambitious partnerships with our allies: this is the case for the military arm of Airbus,
with our European partners, and with Thalès for Australia.

Finally, in spite of the economic difficulties in recent years, we have maintained a
strong defence budget.

Today, the French Defense Forces have the capability to effectively address the
threats facing our values and societies.

**We stand in the Middle East, with our allies the United States, Australia and Great
Britain, fighting Daesh in Irak and Syria.**

**We’re also in Africa, in the Sahel region, where 3000 French troops mostly Special
Forces are deployed to destroy terrorist networks threatening the states south of the
Sahara desert. And we’re still in Central Africa.**

**And finally we’re present at home, where 7000 French servicemen have been
deployed as a part of a unique mission in order to secure potential targets, following
the Charlie Hebdo attack.**

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Just like Australia, France is a country which stands by its values, which explains them and which acts.

Acting means preventing.

But hardware alone will not resolve these global issues.

We believe that terror is just one of the consequences of the imbalances of our modern world and that it needs to be fought on several frontlines.

Therefore, be it at the UN or in multilateral institutions like the G20, we consistently take initiative to build a safer world… a fairer world… where solidarity between nations both wealthy and developing is more than an abstract goal.

Development; health; the fight against illegal trafficking; on all these issues Australia and France have always shared not only values, but actions as well.

And if we took it upon ourselves to chair, next month, a global conference on climate change, it is in this same spirit. It’s about acting before it’s too late. Acting for our civilisation.

Working on the few issues which can jointly mobilise the United States, China, and a majority of developed, emerging and developing countries.

This, in my eyes, is what perpetuates a Creative France.

Living with our history, taking risks when required, and doing everything we can to fight greed, which far too often bears with it the seeds of conflict.

All these characteristics are not exclusively French – we share them with others.

In saying this however – those with whom we share this entire philosophy are few.

What France wants to defend, what France wants to build in this century, I see this vision mirrored in Australia in many regards.
Indeed, we share more than one might think at first glance.

III. Strategic France / Australia partnership

Australia and France, we are seen as middle powers, each well integrated in its own region but mindful of its own security, identity and competitiveness.

Our countries share the same values: equality between men and women, respect for diversity; solidarity for the weakest, and of course “freedom of expression”: precisely that which was targeted this January in Paris, and which triggered such support in Australia.

We can, or should I dare say, we must, build together on this basis.

Today, without wanting to compete with anyone, nor claiming exclusivity, France is ready to offer Australia an ambitious strategic partnership. To respond to the challenges of future generations.

Last year, here in Canberra, President Hollande elaborated the main pillars of this partnership.

The first is linked to security.

Both of us are reliable allies of the US of America.

We also are dedicated to maintaining and developing a good relationship with China.

While France was the first western country to recognize the new regime, in 1964, the late Gough Whitlam followed suit just a few years later.
And we are in fact neighbours, active members in both the Pacific and Indian Ocean regions, with over a million citizens across New Caledonia, Polynesia, Wallis, and la Reunion. Additionally, we have Southern Ocean and Antarctic territories just as you do.

In the coming years we offer you to expand our cooperation in these three oceans, and to become more active partners striving for a more secure, prosperous, and friendly environment for Australia.

France is not part of any regional tension and supporting your country to increasingly exercise its regional and international responsibilities is for France one way to contribute to stability in the region and beyond.

This spirit of contribution also drives us to take part in the competition to build Australia’s next fleet of submarines. It is about empowering you, our partners, by providing you the best available technological and industrial solution – and thus, strengthening Australia’s ability to ensure its own sovereignty.

As I alluded to, instead of making promises, the facts speak for themselves in terms of both technological support and transfer of technology.

In the Western World, alongside the US and UK, France belongs to the very exclusive club of nuclear deterrent nations. This drives France to the highest standards for stealth technology and submarine safety. Accordingly, we control the most complex and sensitive of technologies in our shipyards – it is with this in mind that DCNS has prepared the proposal for your future submarine program.

In terms of transfers of technology, we have worked together highly successfully in the past, and this is an opportunity for us to continue in our legacy.
When Thales took over ADI 25 years ago, leading edge expertise was transferred to Australia. Today, Thales Australia leads the world in sonar systems and for Air Traffic Management.

Our ability to work together on very high tech and complex issues has been duly proven. The recent program of Hawkei armoured vehicles is another example.

But our proposal for submarines however extends beyond this solid technological record. The French Government offers Australia the guarantee of a contract between two states that would pave the way to a wide range of cooperation on many fronts.

We offer partnership in peak research programs – innovative defence technologies and between the government departments implicated in this work. Naval co-operation across the Pacific, Indian and Southern Oceans, fighting trafficking and piracy, broader non-proliferation security initiatives, handling of humanitarian crises.

And this **economic and industrial partnership** should extend beyond merely defence.

I can assure you that the French business community sees a number of exciting and mutually beneficial opportunities in Australia – Smart Cities, Renewable Energy, Transport Infrastructure, Agriculture, Health, Tourism and more.

In all these areas, France’s large businesses are true assets. Their capacity to research and innovate makes them major global players.

No doubt that they will play a key role in helping Australia to diversify its economy in accordance with the demands of this new century.
Indeed, one of the main goals of my mission, as ambassador, is to ensure French investment in Australia develops alongside our political relationship.

In this regard, the forthcoming negotiation of a Free-trade agreement between the EU and Australia is a great opportunity for both sides.

The **final pillar** of our partnership I wish to touch upon, is that of our people.

The men and women who are equally threatened by the challenges of this century but who make our societies what they are.

Be it terrorism, extremism, or any other threat to the values we share— we believe that what united us 100 years ago must bring us even closer today.

Standing before you, I did not come to defend state interests.

I came here today to stretch out a hand of friendship and respect.

One inspired by history and informed by the present.

One that sees our futures linked.

Almost one hundred years ago, Clémenceau, then prime minister of France went to the Australian Imperial Force camp and told them:

“**When the Australians came to France, the French people expected a great deal of you. We knew that you would fight a real fight, but we did not know that you would astonish the whole continent.**

*I shall go back tomorrow and say to my countrymen: “I have seen the Australians. I have looked in their faces. I know that these men will fight alongside us again until the cause for which we are all fighting is safe.”*

This is your lasting legacy.
This, we will always remember.

This, we treasure.

This, again, will unite us in the new century.