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**INDOPACIFIC SPEECH**

**FRENCH MINISTER FOR EUROPE & FOREIGN AFFAIRS**

**4<sup>th</sup> DECEMBER 2023, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB**

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**Ladies and gentlemen, distinguished guests, dear friends,**

**Good afternoon everyone, thank you for being here.**

**I would like to thank the National Press Club for welcoming me today. It is my first official visit to Australia, and actually my first visit ever to Australia and I am delighted to be here in Canberra before heading to Melbourne tomorrow.**

**Thank you for your invitation and for the opportunity you offer me to quickly present some of our views on the Pacific region.**

**I am very much aware that I stand before you eight months after my colleague and friend Senator Penny Wong delivered her seminal address on Australia's foreign policy. I read Senator's words again on my way from COP28 in Dubai to Australia yesterday. And it was inspiring.**

**So, my first message to you after reading this speech is simple: our visions are much closer than one may think. We share the same values, we share the same attachment to multilateralism, to the international rules-based order; and the same will to protect and promote it. We know where we stand, we know who our friends are, and we know where the threats come from.**

**In our fragmented world, with more and more crisis, more and more challenges, less and less respect for the core principles of the UN Charter, we should all do our best to avoid blocs dynamics. Because we have seen these dynamics in the past, and we have seen where they led.**

**Our approach should therefore not be a binary one of "us or them", but one approach based on inclusiveness and solidarity, deeply rooted in increased cooperation between fully sovereign States.**

**Nothing new here. It has been France's DNA since General De Gaulle. France has always followed its own path, seeking convergences and providing options to all partners, so that they can freely choose their way; so that they can have the "freedom of their sovereignty", to quote my President. This freedom that we cherish for ourselves as well as for others. That's what we have been doing by developing what we call "partnerships of sovereignty", in particular in the Indopacific, first with India, then Japan, and now with Indonesia, to mention a few among many.**

**Our foreign policy is focused on building bridges between partners: we do not subscribe to the artificial division line between the "West and the rest" or between demonized Northern countries and a so-called Global South, an expression often used by countries which by the way are neither developing anymore nor living in the South, if I think about China or about Russia. And I think Senator Wong was with us at the recent**

**G20 where our colleague Lavrov in his speech maybe used it six or eight times this expression. Since then, I try to avoid talking about the Global South, but I rather talk about building bridges.**

**Building bridges was all about the Summit France organized last June in Paris for a new global financial pact.**

**In this regard, we very much welcome the APEC summit and the recent meeting between Xi Jinping and Joe Biden in San Francisco, which brought some degree of highly-needed stability to the world, a way to address and be able to manage tensions. There is now a window of opportunity for more constructive dynamics, and I think that Europe and Australia have a role to play to help all stakeholders to make the best out of it.**

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**Building bridges is at the heart of our Indopacific Strategy.**

**Our presence in the Pacific as well as in the Indian Ocean makes us very specific in Europe. It gives us a deep-seated awareness that our fates are intertwined.**

**We were the first country in Europe to have published an Indo-Pacific strategy, announced here in Australia in 2018 by President Macron. We then contributed actively to the development of the EU Indopacific strategy three years later in 2021. In the same vein, we initiated during our EU presidency in the first semester of 2022 the ministerial Indopacific Forum that is now instrumental for the engagement of the EU with the region.**

**And while we face in Europe the worst war since World War Two with the invasion of Ukraine by Russia, far from retreating from the region we remain more committed than ever to the Indo-Pacific prosperity and security.**

**Since November last year, President Macron not only visited India, China, Japan or Indonesia, but also countries where no French President had been for decades, if ever: Thailand, Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, Mongolia, Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu. And we don't just talk the talk, we also walk the walk by increasing our footprint in all fields.**

**First, the economy: over two hundred billion Australian dollars have been invested in the wider region by French companies and the Indo-Pacific already represents thirty five percent (35%) of France's foreign trade. When I say 'already' it is because we see it increasing of course.**

**We are in favour of free trade agreements as long as they are balanced and take into account climate related constraints and our social standards within the EU, two new obligations under new EU regulations.**

**That is why we welcome the recent FTA with New Zealand. We are very happy we could finalise it. With Australia we have our own expectations, so do you. They don't entirely match so far as we have seen. It has led to a pause, we call it a pause, but we remain fully committed to a fruitful conclusion of the ongoing negotiations.**

**Second, development:** France is the fourth largest bilateral donor in the Indopacific and we keep increasing our commitment.

**Third, security:** seven thousand French military personnel are stationed permanently in the Indo-pacific region and regularly deploy first rank assets to bring especially humanitarian and disaster relief as quickly as possible, they also contribute to the security of the region, and ensure as you know freedom of navigation, including but not only in the Taiwan strait.

It brings me to **China**. I was in Beijing a few days ago and had fruitful and intense discussions with my counterpart Wang Yi as well as with the Prime Minister Li Qiang.

As you know, the whole EU, not France alone, defines China as both a partner, a competitor and a systemic rival and we think this tryptic perfectly fits our very complex relationship.

To us, the need to try and work on a positive agenda with China is more important than ever. China has to hear, at the highest level, that we don't have any interest in hindering its economic rise, and it also has to hear our concerns and our expectations.

There are many: the promotion by China of a potential alternative world order; human rights where we have different views; economic unbalances and sometimes coercion; a more and more assertive – I am diplomatic when I say assertive - behavior in its neighborhood, sometimes threatening the safety of navigation. We are of course concerned, in this regard, with what happened few days ago to the Australian Navy as well as with what happened to the Philippines a few weeks ago.

And then there is **Taiwan**. On this issue of concern to the whole world, we are sending very clear messages to all. One, France is fully committed to its one China policy, which is 60 years old already. There is absolutely no ambiguity without doubt about our one China policy. Second, there should be no unilateral change in the status quo, by anybody. And third, calm and stability must prevail in the Taiwan Strait. And surely the world does not need a new crisis.

For all these reasons, we will keep engaging China constructively, and there are actually encouraging signs that our efforts are paying off somehow in creating positive trends of cooperation, on global issues such as climate change, biodiversity or debt relief, but also on the economy to make it more open on the Chinese side and certainly based on reciprocity, the rule of law and the respect of international rules between all partners of the WTO. There is still some progress to go, as you certainly know.

In the meantime, we will accelerate our efforts to derisk and I want to be very specific here again. Derisking does not mean decoupling.

It means building tools to preserve the strategic autonomy of the EU, such as the Anti Economic Coercion Instrument adopted earlier this year. And China does the same.

Our Indopacific strategy is not, has never been, a middle of the road approach. Far from polemics, it is actually very much in line with your “cooperate where we can, disagree where we must, and engage in the national interest”.

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Let me elaborate a bit on what it means for us in the Pacific.

France is a proud member of the Pacific family. In the Pacific, we have a population, we have territories, we have a huge economic zone, interests. The 2050 Strategy for the Blue Pacific Continent of the Pacific Islands Forum serves for us as a golden compass. Our compass to contribute to the Pacific way for a resilient, free and inclusive region.

As an active PIF Dialogue Partner, in close cooperation with New Caledonia and French Polynesia, two PIF members, France will be actively contributing to its implementation plan, including through the Pacific Community where we sit together.

To fulfil this vision of a shared future in the Pacific, we have built over the years a strong diplomatic presence of five embassies in the South Pacific, soon six with the opening of an embassy in Samoa next year. So, it will be Australia, of course New Zealand, Vanuatu, Fidji, Papua New Guinea and Samoa.

We certainly are committed with our Pacific partners to develop concrete solutions to the challenges faced by the region and President Macron last July spent several days in the South Pacific, as I just mentioned earlier; to address the challenges of climate, humanitarian, economic, maritime or civil security.

These are not empty words: President Macron announced in July that France will triple its development aid to the Pacific, dedicating an additional three hundred thirty three million Australian dollars over the next four years.

Let me give you just a few examples.

First and foremost, our resources will directly contribute to the number one priority of the 2050 strategy: fighting climate change and its dire consequences.

In 2021, France launched the KIWA initiative. Australia joined it. So did New Zealand, Canada, and the EU. It has already raised over one hundred twenty seven million Australian dollars to help Pacific states adapt to climate change, increase resilience and protect their biodiversity through nature-based solutions defined and implemented with and by the communities.

So quite logically by the way, when we heard about a Partnership for the Blue Pacific to create synergies and avoid duplications, we wondered if this initiative might be taken on board. We are still wondering.

The same goes for building climate resilient capabilities. France's direct responses here are around two flagship projects, aimed at detecting and mitigating extreme weather events as well as improving climate analysis. Again, they involve many partners.

We have just launched, the day before yesterday, with Papua New Guinea in Dubai a country package for forest preservation, in cooperation with Australia and the EU, gathering one hundred million dollars to start with. And we have been working on

renovating and greening ports in Pacific insular states, as in Rabaul in PNG with Australia and the EU.

I would also like to underline the strong commitment of France to provide humanitarian assistance and disaster relief in the Pacific with its Australian and New Zealand partners, through FRANZ, a coordination mechanism that has proven so useful during its thirty years of existence. The most recent example is in Vanuatu in October with Tropical Cyclone Lola. But there were so many before that and may be more to come.

We are very much open to working more and more with Pacific Island Countries and not only for them in this regard. This is why we will also contribute to the Pacific Warehousing Humanitarian Program led by Australia with one point seven million Australian dollars per year.

Last July, President Macron reiterated France's commitment to maritime security. We are reinforcing the cooperation already undertaken with partners of the Pacific Quad, as well as beefing up support to the Pacific States for the monitoring of their maritime domain.

President Macron announced also in July the creation of a Pacific academy based in Noumea, which will help train civil and military personnel, focusing on HADR as well as civil security. This academy aims to be a team player in the region so it will be open to the whole region.

We are also working on mobility of students, together with the South Pacific, New Caledonia and French Polynesia universities.

Last, the EU CRIMARIO program on Maritime Domain Awareness would be extended to the South Pacific, to fight against illegal fishing and marine pollution. We hope to work in this framework with Australia and with bodies, such as the Pacific Fusion Center and the PIF fisheries agency, to ensure that it brings added-value.

All these initiatives are discussed right now in Noumea in the framework of the South Pacific Defence Ministers' Meeting presided by my colleague Sebastien Lecornu, Minister of Defence for France, with the participation of your Deputy Prime minister and Minister for Defence Richard Marles.

So, we are having a 2+2 in stereo between Australia and New Caledonia, less than a year after the physical 2+2 in Paris last January with Richard Marles and Penny Wong. We agreed back then in January that our relationship should follow two interconnected axes: the fight against climate change and the Pacific. And so we did.

Over the past 18 months, that is the time of the first meeting in Paris between your newly elected Prime Minister, Prime Minister Albanese with President Macron, or 17 months ago if I judge by the first time I had a meeting with Senator Wong, we have worked hard on an ambitious roadmap for the coming years, around a set of concrete projects, which are fully funded and ready to deliver. Penny and I will adopt this roadmap later today. I am really pleased that we did work hard and could achieve this result.

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**Ladies and gentlemen, I will end here my remarks, but be sure that you will find in me a true believer in the potential of our partnership. We are not starting from so low. We have really increased the cooperation in the recent years and there is huge potential to cover. I came to you to convey this message of our commitment to the region and also to pass this message of ambition for the future of the France-Australia relationship.**

**In this difficult world I repeat, we need partners, we need like-minded countries to cooperate more, and we need more than ever to be bold, to be ambitious, and to stand shoulder to shoulder. In the true spirit of Australian “mateship”.**

**Thank you for your attention./.**