

ESU Paris Conference

A “recalibration” of the U.S.-U.K. “special relationship” into a broader, transatlantic alliance was one of the chief recommendations emerging from a high-level seminar convened by the century-old English-Speaking Union in Paris recently.

Over 80 delegates attended the ESU Conference held in the prestigious salons of France-Amériques on 21 September 2009. The Conference was part of the celebration of the ESU’s Three Cities Initiative: an Internship Student Exchange Programme between London, Paris and Washington.

The Conference was hosted by the ESU Paris thanks to Luce Loussouarn and Sophie Loussouarn who organised several events around the topic of the conference. An opening dinner took place in the historical Restaurant le Procope, on Sunday night, a Reception at the Sénat (Palais du Luxembourg) ended up the Conference. Visits of the Assemblée Nationale and of the Residence of the Ambassador of the United Kingdom, the beautiful Hotel de Charost, were also arranged and escorted by Sophie who acted as a translator, on Tuesday 22.

Arguing that the Anglo-American relationship is becoming increasingly asymmetrical as post-bailout Britain moves into an era of defence cuts and the U.S. develops a host of new bilateral and multilateral ties, ESU International Chairman Emeritus Lord Watson of Richmond said it made sense for Washington to forge a new partnership with the European Union, which shares America’s values and comes close to matching its economic clout. “If the new administration in Washington grasps this opportunity, it will demonstrate America’s recognition of inter-dependence,” said Watson. “If Europe grasps this opportunity, it will mark its acceptance of the global responsibility of its economic power.”

Stryker Mc Guire, Editor, *International Quarterly*, wrote:

“The ESU conference was emblematic of the settling relationship between Europe and America following the tensions over the war in Iraq and the marked unilateralism of the presidency of George W. Bush. More than a dozen distinguished diplomats, elected officials, corporate luminaries and experts from Britain, France and the U.S. gave presentations during a day-long session. They included Christine Lagarde, the French Finance Minister, and French MP Hervé Mariton; the current and former U.S. ambassadors to France and Britain, respectively, Charles Rivkin and Robert Tuttle; Sir Peter Westmacott, Britain’s ambassador to France, and Lord Guthrie of Craigiebank, former Chief of the Defence Staff; Microsoft Worldwide Technology Officer Jonathan Murray, Havas CEO Fernando Rodés Vilà, and Sir Robert Worcester, founder of the polling organisation MORI.

Among the participants, there were of course differences of opinion, but a surprising number of points made by the speakers converged on an overarching theme: a warming in the transatlantic chill. On the eve of her departure for the G20 Summit in Pittsburgh, Mme Lagarde made a point of accentuating the similarities and

downplaying the differences between the Anglo-American and Franco-German approaches to the financial crisis, while Lord Guthrie and Sir Peter welcomed France's full return to NATO earlier this year. Just weeks into his posting, Ambassador Rivkin said he was pleased to be coming to France at a time of much-improved Franco-American relations – with much of the credit going, as Sir Robert emphasised, to President Barack Obama, whose election was an almost universal boon to America's reputation in the world.”

Dr Sophie Loussouarn stressed the long-lasting tie linking France and the United States, stressing the role of France for the nascent American Republic in the Age of the Enlightenment and surveying the unflinching and mutual support between the United Kingdom and the United States, at all times.

The complexity of power relationships ensures that there will always be stress points among nations, and the group convened by the ESU touched on a number of them: Afghanistan, Israel-Palestine, Iran, Pakistan. But there are great forces pulling all of us together as well. Sr Rodés Vilà said consumer capitalism and sustainability are drivers that will unite people more than they will divide them in an era of climate change and slower global economic growth. Technology is another unifying, and transformational, force in people's lives, said Mr. Murray. He struck a note perfectly in tune with the ESU's mission of creating international understanding through English, saying that through it all - with computers getting smaller, more “human,” and more sophisticated by the day - the adaptable power of the language of Shakespeare and the corporate boardroom will help bring people, companies and nations together.