

Dîner de gala de la Chambre de commerce franco-norvégienne**8 octobre 2009**

Mr le Président,

Mme la Secrétaire d'Etat,

Mr l'Ambassadeur de Norvège en France,

Mmes et Mrs les membres de la Chambre de commerce franco-norvégienne,

Mmes et Mrs,

Kjære statssekretær,

jeg ønsker å takke deg hjertelig for å ha takket ja til å være vår æresgjest i kveld. Det er en vennskapelig gest som vi setter stor pris på.

(Madame la Secrétaire d'Etat, je souhaite vous remercier chaleureusement d'avoir accepté d'être ce soir notre invitée d'honneur. Croyez bien que c'est un geste d'amitié que nous apprécions vivement.)

Je suis également très heureuse de saluer les conseillères de l'Assemblée des français de l'étranger et nos consuls honoraires, venues de loin pour être avec nous ce soir. Je vous remercie chaleureusement pour votre dévouement au service de la communauté française de Norvège.

Mmes et Mrs,

C'est un grand plaisir pour moi de participer à nouveau au dîner annuel de la Chambre de commerce franco-norvégienne. C'est un plaisir d'autant plus grand que nous fêtons ce soir les 90 ans de la Chambre.

1. The French Norwegian Chamber of Commerce, because of its venerable age but above all because of its achievements, deserves the "total respect" (as the young French generation would say) of the French Ambassador to Norway. I had of course been briefed on its importance before coming to Oslo, but, shortly after I arrived here, I looked for additional information.

I therefore googled its French initials : CCFN. And, much to my surprise, I ended up on the website of “le Club du chat des forêts norvégiennes”, a club dedicated to the Norwegian forest cats, a breed dating back to the Vikings ! The breed is described as very clever, tolerant, affectionate... all qualities obviously inherited from its Viking masters !

2. Coming back to the CCFN we are celebrating tonight, it should not come as a surprise that it is the oldest of the French-Norwegian institutions. In the immediate aftermath of Norway's independence, French investors and banks contributed to the development of the Norwegian industry, already making France one of the first investors in this country before the first World War. To strengthen this cooperation and promote trade, the Chamber was established in 1919, when peace returned in Europe. It immediately attracted many companies and became a driving force in the economic exchanges between France and Norway.

Economic relations between our two countries later took another dimension, a strategic one, with the opening of oil and gas exploitation off the coasts of Norway. With the major French actors in this field becoming very active members, the Chamber went through a new youth.

Indeed, the old Lady managed to remain young ! It did so by adapting itself to a changing environment and by proposing new services, to respond to the needs of business.

2 years ago it established a human resources service to assist companies looking for skilled workers as well as to guide French citizens in their search for work in Norway. We are confident that the new Government regulations which make it easier for EU citizens to work and settle here will confirm how useful this recruitment service is.

For small and medium entrepreneurs who are eager to penetrate our 2 markets, the Chamber plays an invaluable role thanks to its precise knowledge of these markets, of the way to do business in each of our countries but also thanks to its support as a back-office to operate here.

This is why the French Embassy regards it as an extremely important partner in the promotion of bilateral trade. And I am glad that the Chamber and the new Ubifrance Trade Commission in Norway are working in a spirit of complementarity and are conducting joint actions.

3. Mmes et Mrs,

Economic exchanges are at the centre of the excellent relations between France and Norway.

They were obviously affected by the economic and financial crisis, with a slow down in bilateral trade, but they remained quite strong. What is striking is that our 2 governments reacted in a similar way to the crisis, strongly intervening to mitigate its effects. Their recovery plans appear to have been effective, even though we should not declare victory too soon.

The past year was marked by a number of successes that demonstrated the vitality of the bilateral trade and the fact that our companies are participating in the effort to fight climate change, while ensuring energy security.

I would like to mention a few of those successes.

Alstom, signed a contract with StatoilHydro, to build a CCS test center in Mongstad. Technip put together the parts of the marine windmill recently inaugurated off the coast of Karmøy. Total and Gdf-Suez were awarded new permits in the Barents sea. And the new LNG propelled ferries sailing in the Oslo fjord were built in Brittany. Last but not least, we welcomed at Les Halles de Rungis “Simon the Salmon”, the 250 millionth of its kind to be exported to France !

4. For France, Norway is much more than a reliable energy provider, a dynamic investor or a rich market. She is a formidable friend and partner, with whom we share ideals and principles.

This is why, President Sarkozy, when congratulating Prime minister Stoltenberg on the occasion of the recent elections, expressed the desire to continue our joint efforts to face global challenges.

Our 2 countries share the same commitment to defending peace, democracy and human rights, supporting development, including through innovative financing, promoting access to health, and fighting against climate change.

Our 2 countries believe in multilateralism. We are very glad that a great Norwegian, Thorbjørn Jagland, was just elected Secretary General of the Council of Europe, an international organisation dedicated to human rights that we are proud to host, in Strasbourg. Our 2 countries also share the view that globalisation must be better regulated and even “moralised”, and that it is the responsibility of governments to devise the rules. You remember that our dinner last year took place at a time when the financial markets were in turmoil and a sense of panic was prevailing.

Since then, many things have been done : the Summits in Washington, London and Pittsburgh have produced very significant results to stop the crisis from spreading around the world and start a major reform of our financial systems, to reduce the risk that excesses had cast upon the world economy. However, there should be no sense of complacency ; and France will continue to play her part in the new world order which is now emerging.

5. Our 2 countries also look at one another to seek inspiration.

Even though we are very close to Norway in the Human Development Index, in some fields we look at Norway as a model. It is especially true of the situation of women : I would like to congratulate the Chamber for holding this morning such a fascinating debate about “women and business”. You should know that the French Parliament and social partners will soon examine a proposal on the participation of women in the boards of companies which was largely inspired by the Norwegian example.

On our side, apart from our traditional means of attraction, such as food, wine, perfume, fashion, we believe that our advanced technology in many areas, such as transportation, with our high-speed trains, can serve as an inspiration.

Those few examples underline how much we can benefit from exchanging experiences, technologies, ideas and people.

The French Norwegian Chamber of Commerce and its members have greatly contributed to those exchanges for the last 90 years.

I want to warmly thank them for that and wish the Chamber a very long life and many more active members and superb gala dinners. Tusen takk !