

**University Panthéon-Assas & University of Poitiers with the support of
the Franco-British Lawyers Society**

May 23rd and 24th, 2024

From the Entente Cordiale to new Ententes

1904-2024

In 1855, reflecting on Napoleon III's visit to Britain, Queen Victoria wrote: "A remarkable combination of circumstances has brought about the very intimate alliance which now unites England and France, for so many centuries the bitterest enemies and rivals, and this under the reign of the present Emperor."¹ Earlier in 1843, Lord Aberdeen, the British Foreign Secretary in a letter to François Guizot, the former French Ambassador to London, then Louis-Philippe's Foreign minister, alluded to an *Entente Cordiale* between their two countries. Aberdeen an enthusiastic Francophile, Guizot, a French Huguenot from Nimes, had developed a personal friendship which facilitated a *rapprochement* between the two countries. King Louis-Philippe himself believed that an *Entente Cordiale* was in "the real interest of both countries" whilst being fully aware of the difficulties along the way to reach such an agreement.² Thus, unlike what is often thought and without in any way underestimating the strategic, diplomatic, political and military importance of the 1904 *Entente Cordiale*, the latter was the second one between France and Britain.

It was neither an alliance nor a formal treaty based on military cooperation but a declaration resting on mutual trust and diplomatic understanding over their respective territorial possessions and spheres of colonial influence in Morocco and Egypt. John Keiger, a specialist in French foreign policy, describes the 1904 *Entente Cordiale* as "a complicated set of agreements about the distribution, of territory and influence in Africa, Asia and the Pacific between two imperial powers"³. He pointed out that the expression *Entente Cordiale* had "also been used to describe the Anglo-American relationship"⁴. The latter was to loom large over the Franco-British *Entente Cordiale*, Britain being constantly torn between its alliance with France and its "special relationship" with the United States – even more so since Brexit. It was only in 1912 that the *Entente Cordiale* became a formal naval agreement setting up more clearly their reciprocal duties and commitments. The *Entente* found its real *raison d'être* in the first and second World Wars evolving from an informal "settlement of long-standing differences"⁵ to a formal diplomatic and military alliance. Under the European Union, prior to Brexit, it became a symbol of "an enduring commitment to peace and partnership"⁶.

Although unique in its longevity and resilience, the *Entente Cordiale* has led to different interpretations and even misunderstandings from the start. It has survived many disagreements and disputes; the most daunting one since the celebrations of the centenary of the *Entente Cordiale* in 2004 has been over Britain's departure from the

¹ Arthur Christopher Benson and Viscount Esher, *The Letters of Queen Victoria*, Volume III, 1854-1861 London: John Murray, 1908, chapter XXIV, p123.

² Guy Antonetti, *Louis-Philippe*, Paris: Fayard, 1994, p858.

³ John Keiger, "A century ago. How the Entente Cordiale began" in Richard Mayne, Douglas Johnson and Robert Tombs (eds.), *Cross Channel Currents. 100 Years of the Entente Cordiale*, London: Routledge, 2004, p6.

⁴ *Ibid*, p3

⁵ *Ibid*, p6.

⁶ Adrian Pabst and James Noyes, "France and the UK must renew the Entente Cordiale to save the West", *New Statesman*, 2 November 2021.

European Union. The 36th Franco-British summit held in Paris on 10 March 2023 clearly showed some form of *rapprochement* or *détente* between France and Britain after the tensions and divisions generated by Brexit. On the same day, the French President Emmanuel Macron and the British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak issued a Joint Declaration reaffirming “the long-standing friendship and partnership between France and the United Kingdom based on shared memory, common values, respect and mutual interest, and a shared vision to our bilateral future”⁷. March 2023 also saw the publication of *The Integrated Review Refresh* devoted to Britain’s strategic priorities and choices in terms of foreign policy. The latter explicitly refers to France as “a historic ally”⁸ putting an end to the remaining doubts about the state of the relations between the two countries which were raised under the Johnson years (2019-2022) and the short premiership of his successor in Downing Street, Elizabeth Truss. The *rapprochement* with the EU and with France more specifically since 2023 has been facilitated by the good personal relationship between the British prime minister, Rishi Sunak and the President of the French Republic Emmanuel Macron.

The *Entente Cordiale* was for a time seriously threatened by the security trilateral alliance concluded by the United Kingdom with Australia and the United States – known as AUKUS⁹ – breaching an original contract negotiated with France over traditionally propelled submarines to be delivered to Australia. Apart from the financial loss, this was felt as a betrayal by France and led to tensions between the two traditional allies. Yet, the agreement reached on 24 March 2023 over the Northern Ireland protocol – a source of permanent strain between the European Union and the United Kingdom – officially named the Windsor Framework¹⁰, could be interpreted as a sign of a new *Entente Cordiale* between the two old allies and friends. It could pave the way for Britain re-joining the EU’s Horizon science research programme.

The 100th anniversary of the *Entente Cordiale* in 2004 was described as “a historical milestone in UK-French relations”¹¹; the current symposium for its part will examine the way the *Entente* has developed since then, focusing on some key events and /or crises which have put the Entente to the test. Thus, over the last twenty years, the mass terrorist attacks in London in 2005, then in Paris in November 2015; the 2016 referendum on Britain’s EU membership followed by its implementation in 2020; the Covid-19 pandemic; the war in Ukraine (triggered by Russia on 24 February 2022) and the permanent tensions over cross-channel migrants represent some of the most serious global challenges which the *Entente Cordiale* has been confronted with. This international and interdisciplinary symposium on the 120th anniversary of the *Entente Cordiale*, co-organised by the university Panthéon-Assas and the University of Poitiers aims at bringing a fresh, multidisciplinary and transnational perspective on the *Entente Cordiale* in a changing world.

The following aspects will be discussed more specifically:

(I) The History of the *Entente Cordiale* (focusing on the role played by Delcassé; the relationship between David Lloyd George and George Clemenceau...) but also on the impact of the *Entente Cordiale* on World War I and World War II

⁷ www.gov.uk (accessed on 07 July 2023), UK-France Joint leaders ‘declaration, “A New Departure for the Relationship between France and the UK”, 10 March 2023.

⁸ “Integrated Review Refresh 2023. Responding to a more contested and volatile world”, HM Government, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, CP811, March 2023.p22.

⁹ “The AUKUS Nuclear-Powered Submarine Pathway. A Partnership for the Future”, Open Government Licence, 2023.

¹⁰ “The Windsor Framework: A new way forward”, HM Government, His Majesty’s Stationery Office, CP 806, 2023.

¹¹ Richard Mayne, Douglas Johnson and Robert Tombs (eds.), *Cross Channel Currents.100 Years of the Entente Cordiale*, London: Routledge, 2004, forewords, pXii.

In the history of the *Entente Cordiale*, it is important to mention the strategic role of the Secret Protocol (as World War I was looming)

(II) The Theories of Alliances – based on the work of specialists like Stephen Walt or Glenn Snyder, taking into account the evolution, the negotiation and re-negotiation of the historic alliance between France and Britain.

(III) Existing ententes/agreements between France and Britain

-Defence cooperation, focusing on the importance of the Combined French Military Force (negotiated by Emmanuel Macron and Theresa May), a totally integrated force which is now composed of some 10, 000 members of the French and British military.

-Judicial cooperation, including the role played by Liaison Judges in the French and British Embassies but also in terms of Contract Law (including when it relates to employment or business issues), insolvency law and police cooperation

-Cultural cooperation (films; music; academia including ERASMUS ...)

(IV) New Ententes /new bilateral agreements

(1) New agreement on illegal immigration (on “small boats” crossing the Channel)

(2) New Energy Partnership

The language of the conference will be English. The symposium will be followed by a publication in English and/or French.

Communications will last 20mn each and will be followed by a discussion. **Please send your proposals of 400 words and a short biography (in English) by 17 September 2023 to the two organisers:**

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Symposium organised with the support of:

- CERSA Law & Humanities (Panthéon-Assas University - France)
- Franco-British Lawyers Society
- MIMMOC (University of Poitiers - France)

Selective bibliography:

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