



Speech by HHH The Prince Napoleon

Governor-General, Your Imperial and Royal Highness, Your Royal Highnesses, Your Grand Ducal Highnesses, Your Serene Highnesses, Your Illustrious Highness, Your Excellencies, Your Grace, My Lords, Reverend Fathers, Ladies and Gentlemen

I am truly delighted to be here this evening in the heart of this ancient city of London. May I begin by expressing my sincere thanks to the Lord Mayor and Court of Common Council for electing me to the freedom of this ancient city of London and to the Chamberlain of London and his Clerk for presiding at the ceremony earlier this evening.

I would also like to thank my proposer and good friend Sir Anthony Bailey and the 675th Lord Mayor of this city Sir Gavyn Arthur for proposing me for this singular honour. Thank you too for your kind words, dear Anthony, and to all those who have organised this celebration which touches me deeply.

This gathering takes place at a moment of exceptional communion between our two great cities and countries much like ten years ago when London suffered the same terrorist aggressions.

I was very moved when last week all British and French supporters and players at Wembley stadium, sang together the God Save the Queen and La Marseillaise. As a descendant of "Bony", "l'ennemi juré", I would like to express my deepest gratitude.

I have lived for 3 years so far in London, a city I learned to love and admire, and where I learned the world and its complexities.

I remember my first arrival by Eurostar at Waterloo station. This was before the present time of Saint Pancras. I then refrained from reacting with the ambiguous sense of humour of a very well known XIX century French essayist, Alphonse Allais, who thought that the English were strange people. In France, he used to say, we choose victories to name our streets, but they choose defeats! Here I was, proceeding from Waterloo station to Trafalgar Square ... And finally, in order to put

myself in the proper mind, arriving at my host, next to the Duke of Wellington pub! That was enough to discover again that the same coin has always two faces and that, when one's victor celebrates your defeat in an exceptional and dignified way, he introduces you as privileged and lasting part in its national memory.

During my stays, I met many people surprised to meet a Bonaparte on this side of what you call the English Channel and what, in a very unusual humility; we refrain from naming "le chenal français".

In fact, I like to remind those wondering, of the strong links between my family and this country.

Emperor Napoleon admired Great Britain, its institutions and various decision processes, as by the way, did General de Gaulle.

For example, the creation of la Banque de France was inspired from the Bank of England.

I think that, in spite of his tough words for "a nation of shopkeepers", he was recognising a superior trade and maritime power. But later on, there was one who recognised without any doubt such superiority, my great, great uncle Emperor Napoleon III who introduced the French people to modern economic and social realities you pioneered much earlier and so well.

His very strong personal relationship with Queen Victoria was a feature of our Second Empire. Both Emperors left a lasting mark on France and others, but both met their defeat. While one, 55 years before was sent as a prisoner in a small island of the southern hemisphere, the other after his abdication in 1870 was a welcomed guest on this great island.

His son, le Prince Impérial, after his studies at Sandhurst, fought in South Africa, bearing the British uniform and was killed by the Zulus. A marriage prospect existed with one of Queen Victoria' daughters. He is now buried near his Father and Mother in Saint Michael Benedictine Abbey founded by Empress Eugenie in Farnborough.

Relationships between my family and Great Britain were less abrupt than it might appear. They were a complex mixture of personal and State interests, as it is always the case. But, thank God, sometimes, we are offered the chance to merge both. This is what happened to me during the bicentenary of the Waterloo battle last June. People were surprised when I decided to accept His Majesty King Philippe of the Belgians's invitation to attend the commemoration ceremonies.

I did it because I wanted to pay tribute to the courage and heroism of French soldiers on the very battlefield where they died for their Emperor.

I also found quite natural to represent my family to commemorate an event which plaid and still play a cardinal role in history of our societies, our countries and the fate of Europe within and outside our continent.

Finally, I thought a sign of reconciliation among Europeans was needed on such significant anniversary. I felt I should not only attend but also take a meaningful initiative. I thought of a simple but significant symbol of reconciliation able to contribute to efforts made by those in charge today, as they are trying to transform our past and sometimes tragic divisions into a Union able to let us collectively exist with our values, identities and interests in this completely different century.

I submitted a joint declaration to the descendants of the 4 army commanders: Arthur Marquess of Douro and heir of the Duke of Wellington, Prince Blucher for the Prussian Marshal Blucher, His Majesty King Willem-Alexander of The Netherlands for the Prince of Orange. Together we all accepted and signed the declaration with enthusiasm. Each of us read it in our respective language during the official ceremony.

Needless to say that we all felt an emotion, which was going beyond us to the vast mysteries of History.

Because we were aware of our common challenges, we had no difficulty in sharing the same belief, the same moral obligation. Because the rewards of peace are more creative than war, we knew that putting together the name we carry and the different traditions we respect, we could contribute to the fragile reconciliation and unity efforts in Europe.

Tonight in front of such a prestigious and friendly gathering, I feel the meaning of the honour the City bestowed on me. In thanking you all for your presence and, dear Sir Anthony, and Sir Gavyn allow me to add how I value the encouragement you are giving me. I am happy and grateful it's happening at this moment in my private and public life and conscious of its obligations as well as the benefits, which I might enjoy with it!

Thank you and may God bless our two great European nations, our two ancient European cities and our common European identity.