



**Only the spoken text is authentic**

**Address of Valérie Pécresse,  
Minister of Higher Education and Research**

**Closing address at the National Forum on Strategic Research**

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**Wednesday 8 June 2011 – 5:00 pm**

Ladies and Gentlemen,

"Although intelligence is not sufficient for action, it clearly plays a part." These words could perhaps strike us as something of a joke if they had not been spoken by the most illustrious of the professors who have taught at the Military School.

I am of course thinking of General de Gaulle, who thereby anticipated, with *Le fil de l'épée*, (The edge of the sword) the confrontation that would soon be engaged between his own strategic views and those of his superiors. As we all know, this debate, which could appear to be merely theoretical, would soon come to a head - in the cruellest of ways – by the course of history.

With the collapse, France, for the third time in the space of seventy years, saw the ordeal by fire provide a bitter contradiction to its defence doctrine. We have since learned our lessons and our country was among those which succeeded in preparing a strategy at the level of the totally new challenge represented by a world divided into two blocks, both armed with nuclear weapons.

First and foremost, allow me to pay tribute to the brilliant minds who fathered the revival of French strategic thinking. In particular, I am thinking of General Pierre-Marie Gallois, who left us just a few months ago. In his time, he had become not only the symbol of French nuclear dissuasion, but also one of the artisans of the constant dialogue between the academic world and our armies, as we know it today.

**\* New political science for a brand new world \***

One can only observe that the world in which we live has undergone profound changes and that thought patterns, no matter how elaborate they may be, which were built to design our defence and security policy are no longer valid.

Since the fall of the Berlin wall, we even appear to be moving from one upheaval to another. Some even thought that they were experiencing the end of history. Very soon, it became apparent that the international idyll that followed the collapse of the Soviet Union was, at best, an enchanted digression and at worst, nothing more than a delusion.

Since then, the wars and massacres in the Balkans, the tragedy of September 11 and the revolutions in the Arab world have supported the idea that we are living in an unfathomable world, a period which by principle escapes any form of forecasting and anticipation.

Despite that, we would be ill-advised to wallow in a rhetoric of surprise or disaster. Undoubtedly the world in which we live is more complex and less stable than it appeared to be before. For all that, it does not escape analysis, provided that we are able to renew our concepts and methods.

This is indeed the challenge we must face today: The challenge of offering "a new political science in a brand new world", to use the fine expression of Alexis de Tocqueville. This is how we will succeed in grasping the deep-rooted logics which, under a veneer of disorder and uncertainty, today govern the matters of the world.

If there is one belief that all researchers share, it is that the unforeseeable is only the other name for ignorance. Of course, the day and time of occurrence of the crises that shake nations cannot be predicted. From that viewpoint, we should not give in to all the forms of retrospective illusion. That having been said, there is no crisis which is not preceded by warning signs for those who know how to read them. The whole challenge today is to be able to decipher them.

Of course, the task is huge. You have insisted on that throughout this second national forum on strategic research. To better forecast, to better anticipate, to better identify threats and sources of instability, we need to completely reconsider our thought patterns.

The new strategic deal is obvious. It encourages us to untangle the maze of local and global issues, to redefine our vital interests, which are no longer the same in a world where command of networks and data sometimes counts as much as defence of the territory; a world where increasing scarcity of natural resources makes sustainability of national economic models a decisive factor for the power of States; a world where peoples rise again thanks to new technologies and where individuals, when they are caught up in the nihilist spiral of terrorism, become threats in themselves.

**\* Decompartmentalization, a condition for understanding, anticipation and action \***

This is the new world we need to understand to be able to act. And we will not succeed in building the new paradigms we need without uniting all our strengths. More than ever before, the time has come for us to stand together.

First of all, we need to unite disciplines and approaches. Compartmentalization would be a fault: We will have a genuine defence and security strategy only if we combine geopolitics and environmental sciences, economics and international relations and even criminology and information sciences and technologies.

This is true for a very simple reason: The threats we have to face do not stop at national boundaries or *a fortiori* at the boundaries of constituted disciplines and knowledge. That is why, under the impetus of the French President and on your initiative, dear Alain Bauer, the High Council for Strategic Education and Research was created: To support and further the decompartmentalization dynamics of which we were starting to see signs, so as to make this new world comprehensible.

Once again, Ladies and Gentlemen, intelligence is a prerequisite for action. This intelligence must be expressed and implemented without blinkers. That is why I am very happy that the High Council has succeeded, within just a few months, in asserting itself as THE catalyst for strategic education and research.

You have succeeded not only in achieving dialogue among disciplines, but also among researchers and stakeholders in security. By crossing approaches and breaking down walls which too often separated public officials and private decision-makers, you have lent new inspiration to our collective thinking on our defence and security strategy.

You have therefore extended and developed a movement that started with the Institute of Higher National Defence Studies and the National Institute of Higher Security and Justice Studies and I wish to pay tribute to their respective directors, Admiral Richard LABORDE and André-Michel VENTRE. We all know the decisive role these two institutes have played in broadening our scope of vision, by open their doors to civil society and making the meeting of scientists and stakeholders a fundamental principle.

Dear Alain BAUER, with the High Council, you have travelled further down the path and have built the means to lend new dynamics to the scope of strategic research together. To achieve your objectives, you have very fine tools, with the calls for proposals that you have launched to allow the best scientific initiatives in this field to emerge.

In this way, you have opened new spaces for thinking and public debate on strategic issues, as evidenced by this second national forum. As the Minister of Higher Education and Research, I have every reason to be responsive to your approach: Not only because my view is that scientific knowledge must be shared and open, but also because, in this field more than in any other, thinking concerns each and every one of us.

Of course, defence and security issues, by nature, concern the national community as a whole. But this obvious statement has today taken on new meaning: Threats no longer have the appearance of another country or of another alliance. They are multiplied and diffracted; they have silently invaded our private and professional lives. Today, they take on the appearance of data piracy, industrial espionage or terrorism, the shadow of which hovers over our lives.

Again, to avoid wallowing in blindness or obsessive fear, we need research, we need science. Faced with the temptation of fear or denial, we have a duty to understand. We need to analyse and understand the logic of the switch to violence. We need to understand how the networks that threaten us operate. We need to understand the economics of crime and insecurity, with its international financial flows and its secret markets.

Yes, we need research and science so as to analyse and face these new threats. This is a necessity to avoid crystallising our fears around the face of Others. Only the intelligence of phenomena can allow us to be freed of the burden of anxieties and to take action.

Today, we know that security and defence technologies are not enough if they are not guided by in-depth knowledge and doctrine: Economics, political science, sociology and geopolitics all contribute to assisting us in identifying what we are looking for in the digital haze surrounding us today.

That is why strategic research is part of the common good. Dear Alain Bauer, I know the energy you have devoted to achieving greater clear-mindedness by placing strategic issues at the heart of research and by striving to give it an institutional expression. This afternoon, I can assure you that I will always be present to support you.

#### **\* Research and training, strategic challenges \***

I also wanted to say that among the remarkable work undertaken under the aegis of the High Council, there is work that I pay special attention to. Dear Philippe BAUMARD, this is the work that analyses research and training as strategic challenges in themselves.

For a long time, we contented ourselves with considering them from the soft power angle, as if the symbolic attraction of the world's greatest universities were a mere element among others in a prestige policy. In fact, having the best institutions the planet has to offer and attracting the most promising students and the most reputed researchers is no longer a mere issue of prestige or cultural influence. It is quite clearly an issue of sovereignty.

That is why, driven by the impetus of the French President, France has since 2007 made higher education and research one of its top priorities.

Our national cohesion and sovereignty were at stake. National cohesion, because we needed to put universities back at the heart of our higher education system and undertake far-reaching reforms so as to allow universities to offer all our young people a pathway to success and thereby meet the challenges of democratisation.

Our sovereignty itself was also at stake: The knowledge and technologies created in our laboratories allow us to keep control of our destiny in a world where competition is tougher each day and where new challenges arise.

I am, for example, thinking of our energy sovereignty. In the post-oil world, this will no longer be defined as secure and stable access to resources, but as command of new technologies capable of replacing oil. That is why we have placed particular emphasis on research on sustainable or renewable energies, a field in which we have a significant edge, in particular with regard to energy storage and new-generation batteries.

But I am also thinking of our food sovereignty, which is also a basis for our duty of research. Here again, our safety and independence are at stake. That is why, although we need to comply with the precautionary principle which I have always defended, we cannot accept that this principle be misused to freeze French research on what we have rather incorrectly termed "genetically modified organisms" (GMO).

Finally, I am thinking of life sciences and biotechnologies, whose development shows great promise. Once again, the welfare of the French people and our national sovereignty are one and the same: The efficiency of our health systems and their capacity to prevent chronic disease that strikes increasing numbers of patients and represents an increasing share of our health spending will in the future be one of the key factors of competitiveness for our national models. In this field also, our tradition of scientific excellence and of fighting inequalities in health are part of our strategic assets.

Ladies and Gentlemen, we have for too long neglected these assets in the name of a narrow vision of research and science. The greatest paradox was that our country maintained its edge in the field of knowledge, but left other nations to file and use patents which were the direct result of our work. Similarly, while we were training exceptional young researchers courted by the world's greatest universities, we were not allowing French institutions to compete to be able to hire them.

Those times are now past. With the reorganisation of our universities, with the research reform which has made it possible to break down the wall between public and private researchers, with our investments for the future, which will devote 22 billion Euros to research and higher education, our country has finally realized the value of the strategic asset represented by science.

4 years ago, France took a historic step driven by the President. At the height of the crisis, he did not hesitate to invest massively in research and innovation. To achieve this objective, he chose not to use a new form of State scientific planning doomed to fail, but to rely on the

creativity and imagination of scientists themselves, by asking them to present their boldest projects.

Ladies and Gentlemen, the result is that France is again playing a leading role, with the means to attract talent from all over the world. France has understood that it has all the necessary resources to assert its sovereignty and independence, by relying on scientific progress and by working closely with private stakeholders on dissemination of innovation.

In a word, over the last 4 years, we have been building a stronger France, a France which controls its future and which is prepared, in total confidence, to meet the strategic challenges it has to face today, which you have so accurately described.