**INTRODUCTION AU SEMINAIRE AVENIR DE L’UEM**

**RESIDENCE DE FRANCE, 16 AVRIL 2018 A 17h30**

Excellences, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Thank you very much for all being here today. It is a great pleasure, and a great honour to welcome you all here at the residence of France.

The relations between France and the Netherlands are excellent, in every field: political, diplomatic, and economic. As the French President said during his recent visit to the Hague: our relation with the Netherlands is a strategic one.

This visit, followed last week by the visit of the Speaker of the National Assembly has emphasized the many similarities and convergences France and the Netherlands share. Above all we share a special responsibility as founding members of the European Communities: to take care of the legacy and of the future of Europe. That’s why our two countries are at the forefront of a lot of unprecedented challenges to tackle climate change, migration issues, terrorism...- Europe must strengthen its determination and show greater ambition.

Its capacity to defend prosperity for all of its citizens, to reduce economic imbalances and to resist economic and financial upheavals is not the least of these challenges.

Nobody disputes that the Euro Area is a factor of prosperity for each of its members and, no offense to Eurosceptics, represents a key factor of tomorrow’s European sovereignty. However the burst of the sovereign debt crisis in 2010 brought its weaknesses into light.

Since then, much has been done to prevent the explosion of the Euro Area: greater coordination and surveillance of economic and fiscal policies, implementation of the European Stability Mechanism. But nobody will argue that urgent solutions taken in crisis times are rarely optimal.

The first responsibility stays at the national level. And France has clearly accelerated the reforms, with the modernisation of the Labor law, of the tax system, of the education and vocational training for instance. But we must go further and find the good articulation between responsibility and solidarity. The now favourable economic context offers a historic window of opportunity to take initiatives.

In the aftermath of a major financial crisis, priority must be given to the completion of a banking and financial union, to foster cross-border investment while better managing systemic risks. But we also think that the EMU still only works on one leg, the monetary union, and will dangerously sway again at the next crisis if its economic counterpart is not completed in time. In this respect, structural reforms, if necessary, are no longer sufficient. The EMU must, in addition to national reforms, fit itself with specific instruments to fund common investments and stabilize against economic shocks

These are some of the propositions made by the French authorities regarding the strengthening of the EMU. There can be some divergences with the Dutch views. That’s normal. I must even say that the contrary would not be normal. In this regard I would like to underline 3 points.

1/ We have to discuss and to keep in mind to always maintain the dialogue without any polarization. That’s the very spirit of the European Union.

2/ We have to bring our divergences into perspective with our far many more points of agreement. As I said, France and the Netherlands are strongly tied together, through a major trade relations, even to foster “Europe which Protects”.

3/ This meeting can modestly contribute to the bilateral dialogue outlined in “La Sorbonne and Berlin” speeches.

I would like to now give the floor to Mr. Thomas Revial, Director of European Affairs at the Ministry of Economy and Finance in France, and Mr. Harald Benink, Professor at the Tilburg University and London School of Economics, chair of European Shadow Financial Regulatory Committee.