



# THE EUROPEAN INSTITUTE

## **2011 Ambassadors' Gala Dinner**

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### **Remarks by The Honorable Elias Zerhouni**

President of Global Research and Development, Sanofi

I want to thank The European Institute for this great honor. Madame Jacqueline Grapin told me the story of this Institute dedicated to improving the mutual understanding of Europe and the United States. I also want to thank your co-chair, Yves-Andre Istel, for giving me this honor.

As I'm looking at the award gift you just presented to me, I cannot but remark that the depiction of old 17<sup>th</sup> century ships on the cover of this beautiful box is actually a telling reminder of how science and technology have brought Europe and the U.S. closer together. These old ships used to cross the Atlantic many, many years ago, in journeys that lasted several weeks. Today, we just came from Paris in about seven hours. Alexis de Tocqueville, on his famous trip to the United States in the 19<sup>th</sup> Century noted the proliferation of clubs, Institutes and public or private associations all dedicated to constructive purposes in a vibrant civil society. The European Institute continues this tradition by extending it across the ocean. I think this great movement of the creation of a multitude of institutes promoting noble causes many of which were dedicated to the advancement of the sciences is what helped shrink the physical and temporal distance between Europe and the U.S. shrink in the last 2 centuries. But at the end of the day, it is always the mental bridges between our diverse societies that is the hardest to cross. This is the important factor that is the challenge of the world today, a mission that your Institute helps fulfill across the Atlantic.

I'm honored to be honored in the company of Madame Lagarde. I have to say that when she stated a minute ago that she was desperately optimistic, I hope it's not delusional. I hope that it's real because I pray for you to succeed. The reason I pray for you to succeed is that great innovations that benefit mankind can only exist in vibrant economies where a surplus can be dedicated to the long and arduous process of discovery and invention. Throughout history, great economies have always supported great innovation for the benefit of the people. What really worries me is that governments, pressed by the issues of today, are likely to forgo the investments needed for a better tomorrow.

This would be short-term wise and long-term foolish. The search for knowledge, innovation, invention, discovery, have always been part of the solution of mankind's problems. This is even more true today, and even more true in my field of biomedical research. Because if we do not solve the problems of health care, health care costs will bankrupt the economies of the world and as a consequence lead us to a downward spiral where the solutions of tomorrow will be impossible.

Probably, the person that has done the most for the National Institutes of Health of the U.S., which I had the privilege to direct for 7 years, is Madame Lasker. The Lasker Award is a prize that we give here in the United States for medicine. In the 1950s and 60s she fiercely and almost single handedly used her wealth to lobby the government of the United States to invest federal dollars in research across the board. When she was asked why do you want to do this, she said, "first: disease knows no politics nor borders and two, if you think knowledge is expensive, try ignorance!"

So in my opinion, the NIH a real jewel at the service of humanity is a perfect example of how, in fact, good economies create not only great institutions from which great discoveries can spring but also good international relations as shown by the thousands of scientists from almost every country in the world and in particular Europe who trained there.

Economies that do not grow, on the other hand, lead to a crisis, and we see it today unfortunately. The global fund for AIDS, malaria and tuberculosis has run out of money. This is something, which for me is very worrisome. The generous pledges made by many countries that sustained this endeavor in good economic times cannot be made anymore. This is why, again, I pray for you Madame Lagarde to please continue to speak up as you have already done because we can't manage reality unless the truth of the reality is managed itself. This is I think the example and the fundamental duty that we have - all of us - to always speak truth to power.

The 20th Century was the century of physical sciences. The 21st Century will succeed or fail on the basis and advances of the life sciences. We need to be able to reduce the burden of disease on the population of the world.

When Alexis de Tocqueville was here, the total population of the world was about 600 million people. In 1950 it was 2 billion people. Today, we're reaching seven billion with almost 40 million new births every year that will lead to a population of 9 billion by 2050. Almost ninety percent of this demographic growth will occur in countries with less developed economies - only 10 percent in developed economies

When you look at these trends, I see a world that is not globalizing in a homogenous way. In fact, it's a world that is globalizing in what I call – deglobalization. We have parts of the world that are connected and increasingly sharing the benefits of economic growth and research and a part of the world that is growing fast but is not as connected. .

Researchers point out that the key driver of social instability and political crises in the world is actually the percentage of young males between the ages of 18 to 29 who are not employed. Unemployed young males are trouble. Well, there will be 1.2 billion of them in a few years from now.

We have to find growth and job opportunities for all of them. We have to find a way to promote, if you will, the exchanges that we need to have across the world to be able to engage in the development of new solutions for the problems of health, education and economic stability worldwide. Because without the health, you can't have an economy, without an economy, you have no growth. Without growth you cannot really sustain the situation that we're dealing with.

So in fact, when you look at this combination it is clear that no single country in the world can alone provide a sustainable solution. It will have to come from effective global cooperation.

One of my heroes is Pasteur, the discoverer of modern vaccinology, who created the Institut Pasteur in France. In his founding document he insisted that he wanted to create institutes not only in Paris but also around the world. There are now 29 institutes that have been created because of the vision of Pasteur. So in the 19th Century, he saw the world in the 21st Century where we're all co-dependent. There is absolutely no one who can escape from the impact of

disease and the impact of possibly being able to develop solutions for that because at the end of the day, the three are connected. This is why during my tenure I tirelessly worked to build closer ties between the NIH and many institutions around the world most particularly the Pasteur institutes who helped tremendously in managing the pandemics we experienced in the past 10years.

Our need for growth; our need for economic recovery; our need to continue to sustain innovation across the world remains as critical as ever.

This is why I'm so pleased to have had the opportunity to come tonight and celebrate The European Institute; to also speak to the need to continue to bridge across the Atlantic and bridge not just the distance but also the minds. Because at the end of the day, it is our cooperation that is going to make it possible for us to sustain what has been the hallmark of this century and the past century - science and technology at the service of humanity.

So thank you very much for having me tonight with best wishes for continued success in your mission. Thank you very much.