Beat: Politics

“WE CHOOSE CONQUEST" EXTERNAL TRADE MIN. FORISSSIER CALL TO PUT FRENCH BUSINESS

AT THE HEART OF FOREIGN POLICY

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USPA NEWS - At the Quai d’Orsay on 24 September, Nicolas Forissier, Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness, delivered a message built around one phrase: “the will to conquer.” Before business leaders, public agencies, diplomats, parliamentarians and exporters, he argued that France cannot wait for growth to come to it. French companies, he said, must secure their supply chains, diversify their partners and compete for new markets abroad. The meeting was organised explicitly around France’s place in global economic competition and the government’s plan to strengthen support for companies internationally.

Nicolas Forissier, Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness Forissier presented a one-year assessment of ministerial action: 23 official visits in 27 countries across six continents, 22 geographic business forums and support for approximately 11,000 companies through Business France and the Team France Export network. The minister described the figures as evidence of an administration seeking to make export support more concrete and better coordinated for companies of every size.

A DIFFERENT WORLD FOR FRENCH EXPORTERS
The wider Team France Export network supported 11,310 companies internationally in 2025, according to reporting on the event.
Nicolas Forissier, Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness argued that French companies are operating in a more fragmented world than they were five years ago. Energy insecurity, disruption around strategic maritime routes, tariff policies, China’s control of parts of the rare-earth supply chain, global competition in artificial intelligence and quantum technology, and the return of economic power politics have all changed how trade works.

“If we do not go out to conquer markets, others will take them.”

“The temptation to shut ourselves away would be a major mistake.”

“Diversification is our survival.”

The Minister Nicolas Forissier rejected the idea that trade is a neutral, borderless process governed only by market forces. In his view, governments now shape access to markets, technology, strategic resources and industrial capacity. Yet he also warned that France must not respond to this reality with isolation: approximately 80 percent of goods trade still follows international rules, while one in four French employees depends on exports.

His proposed answer was a three-part strategy:

Secure: protect supply chains, energy access and critical materials.

Conquer: seek growth markets and new commercial opportunities.

Build: create durable, mutually beneficial partnerships.

“The rest of the world will not wait for us.”

Quotes above are drawn from the minister’s speech as recorded in field notes and supported by the official speech and event reporting.

A NEW MAP OF OPPORTUNITY FOR FRENCH FOREIGN TRADE

Nicolas Forissier, Minister Delegate for Foreign Trade and Economic Attractiveness urged companies to look beyond familiar European markets toward the Gulf, Central Asia, India, Latin America, Mercosur, Africa, the Indo-Pacific and the Balkans. This does not mean withdrawing from Europe. He described the European Union's 450-million-consumer market as a major source of stability and commercial leverage, particularly when it responds to unfair competition.

"Europe must be more creative and less naïve."

He also linked commercial expansion to a more assertive European approach to trade rules, including the need for fair competition, effective tools against coercion and greater attention to "mirror clauses" that require imported goods to meet comparable standards.

The minister said France must reduce strategic dependence in areas such as rare earths, critical minerals, pharmaceutical inputs and agricultural products. He pointed to cooperation with partners including the United States, India, Brazil, African countries and Indo-Pacific states as part of a broader effort to diversify sources of supply and strengthen resilience.

TEAM FRANCE EXPORT: FROM SUPPORT TO "CONQUEST MODE"

A central theme of the evening was the transformation of public support for exporters. Minister Forissier called for a more unified "Team France" bringing together Business France, Bpifrance, the French Development Agency, regional authorities, chambers of commerce, employer federations, French foreign-trade advisers, ambassadors, elected representatives and French businesses abroad.

"We must make sure that this team starts from the concrete needs of each company and accompanies it over time, from its territory to the market it seeks to conquer."

"We must love our companies before we distribute wealth: first, we have to create it."

Minister Forissier announced a reform of Business France focused on companies with high export potential and countries with strong growth prospects. Its stated aim is to reduce fragmentation, help SMEs and intermediate-sized firms access international fairs and ensure that agencies work together rather than in separate institutional silos.

Minister Nicolas Forissier cited Morocco as an example of coordinated support, saying French actors had mobilised financing for a strategic rail project in order to bring French companies, including SMEs and intermediate-sized firms, into the supply chain. His broader argument was that an entrepreneur does not need the state to replace private initiative, but does need public agencies to remove obstacles, open doors and provide credible support abroad.

ERIC TRAPPIER CEO DASSAULT AVIATION INDUSTRY SAYS: "INNOVATION NEEDS PRODUCTION"

Eric Trappier, Chairman and Chief Executive of Dassault Aviation, made one of the evening's strongest industrial arguments: innovation and export success can only endure if France remains competitive enough to manufacture at home. Dassault Aviation may be globally known for the Rafale and Falcon aircraft, but Trappier reminded the audience that its success relies on a wide national supply chain. He said that hundreds of companies are connected to the group's industrial activity, meaning that the competitiveness of one major exporter directly affects subcontractors, skills and employment across France.

"The ability to produce in France is part of French sovereignty."

Trappier argued that France must reduce the burdens that weaken industry's ability to compete internationally: production taxes, accumulating regulations and standards that can be more demanding than those imposed on competitors abroad. His central point was not that rules should disappear, but that French manufacturers must not face a structural handicap while competing against American and Chinese companies.

"We do not compare ourselves with the developing world; we compete with the United States and China."

In his view, the question is one of a level playing field. French aerospace companies face highly subsidised competitors, different tax systems and less restrictive production conditions elsewhere. If national and European rules become too costly or too complex, he

warned, companies will be forced to reconsider where they invest and produce. He said that the consequence could ultimately be a transfer of industrial activity outside France, not because companies reject French skills, but because they must remain competitive to survive and win contracts.
This warning echoes a long-standing concern expressed by Trappier: producing competitively in France is increasingly difficult, even though Dassault continues to invest heavily in French facilities and maintains core industrial capacity there. The company has also expanded manufacturing and partnerships abroad, including in India, partly to meet export requirements and improve competitiveness. (Source : Dassault/Aviation)
“If we impose rules and costs that our competitors do not face, we will be forced to leave the territory.”

“If we impose rules and costs that our competitors do not face, we will be forced to leave the territory.”

He also defended business aviation against what he described as unfair public criticism. Falcon aircraft, he argued, should not be reduced to symbols of luxury; they are working tools for executives, entrepreneurs and companies operating internationally. For Trappier, supporting business aviation is therefore part of supporting mobility, exports and French industrial capacity.
The chief executive’s argument linked directly to the minister’s “will to conquer” theme. Export policy cannot operate separately from industrial policy: French companies can win markets only if they retain the capacity to innovate, manufacture and invest at home. That requires public support for research, stable rules, competitive conditions and political backing when French companies compete abroad.

Eric Trappier, Chairman and Chief Executive of Dassault Aviation, brought the perspective of a company whose business is deeply international. He said the strength of French aerospace and defence rests on skills, innovation and the ability to produce in France, but warned that competitiveness can be undermined by excessive production taxes, regulations and uneven competition.

“The ability to produce in France is part of French sovereignty.”

“We do not compare ourselves with the developing world; we compete with the United States and China.”
Eric Trappier stressed that international success depends on products, technical expertise, attention to customers and political support, particularly in defence markets. He also warned that companies competing globally need a level playing field rather than additional burdens that make production in France more difficult.

SOPHIE PRIMAS , SENATOR OF YVELINES STRESSED ON THE ROLE OF THE REGIONS AND PLEDGES FOR DECNTRALISATION
Sophie Primas, Senator for Yvelines, emphasised the role of regions and local networks in helping small businesses export. She argued that France’s “hidden champions”, SMEs and intermediate-sized firms with strong expertise, need simpler procedures and better local support. The agri-food sector raised a similar concern: only a small share of smaller firms export successfully because international expansion requires capital, expertise, time and persistence.

DIPLOMACY AND FINANCE JOIN THE EFFORT ACCORDING TO CHRISTOPJE LECOURTIER D.G OFF FDA (FRENCH DEVELOPMMENT AGENCY, AFD)
Christophe Lecourtier, Director General of the French Development Agency, said the AFD would join the Team France approach more directly. He described an annual financing capacity of around €13 billion and argued that development projects should combine partner-country development objectives with economic and diplomatic benefits, while respecting the needs of recipient countries.

He said the AFD’s long-standing presence in emerging economies can help French firms understand local conditions, identify projects and compete more effectively for contracts. The agency is also seeking ways to weigh qualitative criteria more strongly in procurement and to improve financing links with Bpifrance.

FROM THE GLOBALISATION G.D OF MFA, ANNE GRILLO, WRAPED UP THE MEETING IN FAVOR OF THE “MADE IN EUROPE”

Anne Grillo, Director General for Globalisation at the Foreign Ministry, described the new approach as a more integrated form of economic diplomacy. She argued that globalisation has not disappeared; instead, economic relations are increasingly shaped by resilience, protection, competition and political influence.

“Sovereignty, yes but pragmatically.”

She called for a balance between openness and protection, with greater European coordination on “Made in Europe,” anti-coercion tools, strategic investments and partnerships built on trust. France’s diplomatic network, she said, must combine economic, scientific, cultural and technological influence to support national competitiveness.

A CALL TO ACT BEYOND FRANCE’S BORDERS

The Quai d’Orsay evening made clear that Minister Nicolas Forissier’s approach to foreign trade is not limited to export statistics. It is a political argument: France must stop treating international markets as secondary to domestic debates and recognise that production, innovation, jobs, supply chains and sovereignty are connected to the country’s role in the world.

The minister’s message was optimistic but demanding. France is admired abroad, he argued, and has the talent, companies and territories to compete. Yet success will require companies willing to take risks and public institutions willing to work faster, more coherently and closer to the field.

“France does not have a vocation to watch others conquer the markets of tomorrow.”

“I choose conquest and I want us to achieve it together.” Says Minster Forissier’s

Whether this strategy succeeds will depend on results that businesses can measure: access to decision-makers, finance, market intelligence, fair competition and contracts. Minster Forissier’s final challenge was therefore directed at both government and business: economic influence is not inherited. It must be organised, supported and won.

SOURCES

French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, announcement of the 24 September 2026 event and its purpose.

Nicolas Forissier, official opening speech at Entreprises à l’international: la volonté de conquête, 24 September 2026.

Event reporting on the Team France Export reform, Business France’s priorities and the companies supported internationally.

Field notes taken during the conference and panels at the Quai d’Orsay, Paris, 24 September 2026.

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