



PRIX
FRANÇOIS GUIZOT
INSTITUT DE FRANCE



François Guizot-Institut de France 2022 prize

Award ceremony

Monday 4 October 2022, 6:30 PM, Grande Salle des Séances

Speech of Xavier Darcos

Chancellor of the Institute

Two years after our last award ceremony for the François Guizot Prize, which took place in a restricted committee, and almost ten years after the creation of this prize, I am pleased to welcome you to the Institut de France.

It is particularly impressive to gather in this Grand Hall of Sessions (Grande salle des séances) that the statesman, member of three academies of the Institute, had built, and where he sat so often during his very long academic career.

Indeed, as early as the 1830's, the historian François Guizot was elected member of the Académie des Inscriptions et belles-lettres, and then the Académie française opened its doors to the political orator - in the 40th chair, which I have the honor to occupy today. But before that, he had naturally found his place in the Academy of Moral and Political Sciences, whose re-establishment he had proposed to King Louis-Philippe in 1832.

The founders of academies are not numerous, and their names are among the most glorious of our French history. Guizot can be considered as one of them, that is why it is fortunate that his memory is perpetuated among us, in the form of this biannual prize - and I thank the François Guizot Association for its collaboration with the three academies of which our great man was a member.

As if his historical works and his political action had not been enough, Guizot wrote in his retirement the admirable *Memoirs to serve the history of our time*, which one could say can also serve us to understand our own present time. Indeed, at the time of awarding the François Guizot 2022 prize to our laureate, Mrs. Françoise THOM, whose work on Russia and Soviet history is well known and admired by all, it is very tempting to give the voice to Guizot himself, and to present here an extract from his famous memoirs. In volume 4, while analyzing the diplomacy of France and the international relations of his time, the former Minister of Foreign Affairs writes these lines:

"The essential and undisputed maxims of European public law are few in number. Among the principal ones is this one:

Peace is the normal state of nations and governments. War is an exceptional event and must have a legitimate reason. [...]

These salutary maxims have been put to the most severe tests in our days. Sometimes they have been outrageously trampled underfoot in order to give free rein to the very passions they are intended to restrain; sometimes they have been scandalously abused in order to serve purposes that they expressly condemn. We have witnessed the most immense wars undertaken without legitimate motive, by a selfish and unbridled ambition, or to carry out arbitrary and frivolous combinations under an air of grandeur. [...]

Great governments have oppressed the independence of small nations, in order to maintain, among them as among themselves, the principles and forms of absolute power. [...]

European public law has not perished in its failures; [...] it is from its empire alone that we can hope, as far as the imperfection of human things permits, for the habitual maintenance of peace and mutual independence as well as of the security of States."

If we honor François Guizot today, in this house that was so dear to him because it was the refuge of freedom in all its forms and first and foremost that of thinking, it is not only to remember a great man of the past. It is also to draw lessons for the present. This is the profound vocation of our academies. That is why I am pleased to say: welcome to the Institut de France.