Beat: Politics

THE 3 S's: SECURITY SUSTAINABILITY SOVEREIGNTY PM LECORNU's CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK

AT WORLD SPACE GIVERNY FORUM

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USPA NEWS - On 4 September 2026, the Musée des Impressionnismes in Giverny became the setting for a discussion that travelled far beyond the gardens, the village and the Seine valley. At the eighth World Giverny Forum, Prime Minister Sébastien Lecornu framed climate adaptation, economic competitiveness, public finance, defence, technology and space as parts of the same strategic question: can France and Europe still choose their own course?

This on-the-ground report was produced with HandyJournalists, an agency committed to disability inclusion and equal access to public-interest reporting. The contrast with the day's earlier transport arrangements was striking. At Giverny, wooden ramps, usable paths and careful access arrangements made the Museum of Impressionism's landscaped site remarkably wheelchair-friendly. In a village known for narrow historic streets and Monet's legacy, that practical attention to mobility made the forum's language of sustainability and social responsibility visible in everyday reality.

Arriving at the same time as José Manuel Barroso, the former President of the European Commission, and shortly before the Matignon press pool, political journalists, and politicians

A FORUM IN A LANDSCAPE OF IDEAS
The forum's location was part of its message. Giverny is a small Normandy village associated with Claude Monet, landscape painting and the Musée des Impressionnismes. Yet, for one day, the site hosted a dense programme on Europe's economic resilience, critical infrastructure, water, food, electrification, artificial intelligence, mental health, defence, energy and geopolitical risk.

Romain Mouton, president of the Cercle de Giverny, has built the forum around the premise that ecological and social transitions should become practical levers for decision-makers. The 2026 programme placed its debates under three S's: security, sustainability and sovereignty. Speakers included former European Commission President José Manuel Barroso; Roland Lescure, Minister of the Economy, Finance and Industrial, Energy and Digital Sovereignty; General Jérôme Bellanger, Chief of Staff of the French Air and Space Force; OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann; World Bank representative Martin Raiser; and leaders from major companies and institutions.

Around 1,000 economic and institutional leaders were expected for the event, which presented sustainability not as a corporate add-on but as a source of competitiveness, power and sovereignty. The Cercle de Giverny also announced 30 proposals from its annual working groups. The day's agenda showed how far the Forum has moved beyond the narrower language of corporate social responsibility. The question was no longer simply how companies can reduce harm. It was how societies, public authorities and businesses can withstand disruption while retaining the capacity to act.

EUROPE, CHINA AND THE POLITICS OF INTERDEPENDENCE
The final plenary began with Deng Li, China's Ambassador to France and Monaco, in a conversation moderated by Charlotte Kan. He urged Europe and China to pursue what he described as patient, pragmatic dialogue, grounded in mutual respect and shared interests.

The ambassador argued that Europe and China are deeply economically interdependent. He said competition should not prevent cooperation in strategic fields such as artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and humanoid robotics. He also presented China's energy transition and manufacturing capacity as evidence that climate policy and industrial scale can progress together.

His argument was clear: neither subsidy nor protectionism alone can create durable competitiveness; stability comes from dialogue, trade and managed interdependence. Published accounts of his intervention similarly highlighted his call for pragmatic dialogue and future-oriented cooperation between Europe and China.

Prime Minister Lecornu spoke immediately afterwards. He avoided turning his speech into a direct response to Beijing, even joking that he had to be careful with his wording because China's ambassador was in the room. Instead, he used the moment to place Europe–China relations within a larger debate over geopolitical fragmentation, strategic dependence and the need for democratic countries to preserve freedom of decision.

THE 3 S's AND THE FREEDOM TO CHOOSE

"Security, sustainability and sovereignty": the Forum's three S's were, Prime Minister Lecornu said, closely interconnected. "Sustainability and security bring us almost inevitably to sovereignty," he argued, suggesting that the formula was less three separate subjects than "two plus one S."

For him, security concerns the ability to endure shocks. "Security raises above all the question of holding on," he said, pointing to heatwaves, fires, drought and the pressure on agriculture. Sustainability also means endurance, but across generations: what should today's decision-makers leave to those who come next?

Sovereignty, in Sebastien Lecornu's formulation, was not isolation. It was choice. "Sovereignty is choosing," he said. It means resisting external pressure where necessary, accepting cooperation where it is deliberate, and refusing to let dependence become an accident of weakness. "At the end of the day, it is the freedom to choose, or to give up every form of freedom and submit."

That distinction matters for Europe. Prime Miniser Lecornu did not advocate autarky. He argued that alliances can reinforce sovereignty when they are chosen, designed and reciprocal. But he warned against confusing collaboration with a loss of strategic capacity. Europe may need shared scale in finance, technology, energy, defence and space; what matters is retaining the ability to make the final decision.

RISK, RESILIENCE AND THE LONG TERM

The Prime Minister's speech was also a critique of the French relationship with risk and time. "Zero risk does not exist," he said. Governments can be agile during crises, he added, yet become overly rigid in normal times a paradox that leaves the country exposed to future shocks.

Prime Minister Lecornu's historical reference was stark. Recalling a conversation with Admiral Philippe de Gaulle, he returned to the question of why France collapsed in 1940. His conclusion was that a country must avoid preparing for yesterday's conflict and arriving too late for tomorrow's threats. "Our real risk, as French people, is to be defeated without being invaded," he said.

He listed the pressures that now compete with states: nuclear coercion and war near Europe; cyberattacks and digital interference; financial-market volatility; organised crime; climate disruption; energy insecurity; and demographic decline. The state remains essential, he argued, but cannot respond alone. Municipalities, regions, companies, civil-society organisations and citizens all have a role in building resilience.

The political consequence is difficult but simple, he said: France cannot finance every priority at full scale. "We will be sovereign on what matters only if we are capable of making choices." That requires accepting trade-offs rather than promising everything at once.

FROM MAIASPACE TO OUTER SPACE

Only hours earlier, Prime Minister Lecornu had been in Vernon to lay the foundation stone for MaiaSpace's future factory, designed to produce a reusable European mini-launcher. At Giverny, he returned to that project as an illustration of his argument about choices, investment and strategic autonomy.

France, he said, has strengths in artificial intelligence, quantum technologies and New Space applications, even while it must address its delay in reusable launchers. The MaiaSpace project is intended to reduce that gap. It reflects a broader French and European ambition: not merely to use space services supplied by others, but to retain the ability to design, manufacture, launch and operate strategic space systems.

Space sovereignty is increasingly inseparable from terrestrial sovereignty. Satellites underpin communications, navigation, weather forecasting, climate observation, emergency response, financial systems, agriculture, intelligence and defence. The United States

retains an overwhelming commercial and technological lead through companies such as SpaceX, while China is expanding its own launch, satellite and lunar capabilities.

Europe therefore faces a fundamental question: whether to remain primarily a customer or to preserve independent capacity in strategic segments.
Sebastien Lecornu's warning about long-term thinking applies directly to space. "There is no sovereignty of choice without long-term thinking and stability," he said. "It takes ten years to build a research laboratory, one year to close it and fifteen years, at three times the cost to rebuild it."

WHO WRITES THE RULES FOR SPACE?
The World Giverny Forum offered an unusual setting for a debate about power: a highly accessible, green cultural site in a historic village, where questions of climate, public services, technology, social cohesion and defence shared the same programme. Its underlying message was that sustainability cannot be separated from security, and that security cannot be separated from the freedom to decide.

Prime Minister Lecornu closed with a call for patriotism, arguing that no sustainable national project can exist without a collective will to build it. Quoting Charles de Gaulle, he said: "Great peoples are great because they wanted to be."

For France and Europe, sovereignty in space will require more than rockets, satellites and budgets. It will require industrial choices, international partnerships, democratic accountability and rules that prevent orbit from becoming a new arena of uncontrolled competition.

As states and private companies accelerate their activities beyond Earth, the question is no longer only whether France, the United States, China or Europe can reach space. Who does outer space belong to? Who is entitled to regulate access, orbital traffic, resource use, debris and security? And is it time to create a stronger global framework for the shared and responsible governance of outer space comparable, in principle, to the international rules developed for the seas?

By Rahma Rachdi, reporting from Giverny, Normandy, with HandyJournalists
Disclaimer
This independent on-the-ground report was produced with the support of HandyJournalists, an agency committed to disability inclusion, accessibility and equal working conditions for journalists with disabilities. The World Giverny Forum's venue at the Musée des Impressionnismes provided an accessible, wheelchair-friendly environment, including wooden ramps and usable circulation routes throughout its landscaped setting. Earlier in the day, however, no ramp-equipped shuttle was available for the wheelchair-using journalist covering both the Vernon and Giverny sequences of the Prime Minister's visit. The reporter travelled independently with her assistant and personally incurred transport costs while collective transport was available for other accredited journalists. Full inclusion must cover the complete reporting journey, not only access inside the venue.

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