

ELISABETH GUIGOU

President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the French National Assembly

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

Merci beaucoup. Je voudrais passer la parole en premier à Elisabeth Guigou, compte tenu tout spécialement des derniers événements, derniers événements auxquels il faut rajouter ceux d'aujourd'hui - une nouvelle tragédie à Bamako. Je comprends que c'est terminé, mais c'est encore un événement de plus dans cette longue série, qui n'est malheureusement sans doute pas terminée.

Elisabeth Guigou, President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the French National Assembly

Paris: 129 people killed and 352 wounded, from 19 different countries. This was an unprecedented tragedy, not just because of its magnitude, but also because of how it was carried out. It was conducted very professionally, whereas the previous attacks seemed rather amateurish. The simultaneousness and the number of terrorists were also unprecedented. So were the targets. The victims were not famous figures or symbols, just ordinary young people — a diverse mix of young people from various backgrounds, united by the same enjoyment of life. And that is what the terrorists wanted to attack: a way of life. I would even go so far as to say that they attacked an art of living, in other words, young people who enjoy sports and getting together with friends at sidewalk cafés.

I think we must become aware of this. That obviously means we are seeing the feeling grow in France that this can happen anywhere, anytime, to anybody. And yet, despite that, I am always meeting people who say, "We must not let the terrorists terrorise us. We must show them that we stand together and are not afraid. We must keep on living as we always have." This can be seen in the public reactions we have witnessed.

What they wanted to attack is not so much what France is or is not doing in the Middle East, but who we are and what we represent in history too. I am grateful for the magnificent outpouring of international solidarity, expressed by our flag being displayed on the most beautiful monuments and our national anthem being played in many places. That was very comforting.

That said, I obviously believe that we must move beyond our emotions and see what can be done. Thierry, you have invited us here to see how we can envision the Middle East's future. How can we strive for peace and stability in that part of the world?

First, I think the main thing is to become aware that Europeans and Africans must work together. I hope we will also talk about North and Sub-Saharan Africa, because from Mauritania to the Sahel, from Libya to Egypt and Lebanon, the same nebulous terrorism is coming together. I think we need to act together. We have every reason to do so because the future of Europe, Africa and the Middle East is more interconnected than ever — not just because of our geographical proximity and the terrible links that can be created, but also because of the human links between us — ties stemming from history, from the fact that our populations are mixed and from the fact that when instability rocks the Middle East, Europe no longer knows how to control and welcome refugees. And also because obviously now, we have a common enemy, an ideology of death and destruction that clearly has nothing to do with Islam, but takes Islam hostage. We must confront this foe together because, if we do not, I fear it will continue to thrive.

We must act together, but how? ISIS or Daesh has 30,000 to 40,000 fighters. If we implement a joint strategy using every means at our disposal, we can not only contain but defeat the enemy. Obviously, all the players must come together. In other words not only all the countries of the region, whatever the differences between them — we are well aware of the traditional antagonisms — but also, of course, the United States and Russia, a major player that obviously must have a key role, key role that it has in international affairs, especially in that part of the world. I think the second meeting in Vienna on 14 November, which managed to accomplish this, was really something remarkable.

With regard to the means at our disposal, there is military action. Here, we know that the solutions are never military — they are political — but the use of military force remains necessary. In our discussions, I hope we will come back to the most effective way of combining air strikes, which France is leading with other countries, and which, to me, seems necessary to step up for the time being — but France cannot do that alone — with boots on the ground if we are serious about defeating Daesh.

But the real solution is political. The outcome of the Vienna conference on 14 November is heartening because we now have specific goals, a timetable and a strategy. So far, everybody was saying, “We want to fight Daesh. The solution is political.” But we had not yet begun a political process. Now, we have the inception of a political process with specific goals.

We must also go after Daesh’s funding. Military action alone will not defeat them. Daesh has a grip on Mosul and on assets of the Central Bank. There is oil and all kinds of trafficking. We started at the G20 meeting in Turkey, but we must obviously step up our efforts.

Here is my last comment. You might say, “Yes, but all that will take time.” Of course it will! Five or ten years? I hope not, but it will take time. But afterwards, how can we ensure that it will not happen again? How can we ensure lasting stability? I think two essential things must be prepared already. The first is a much more intense, coordinated fight against radicalisation. This is a matter that obviously must be taken up not just by governments, but also by religious leaders. A battle is raging within Islam, because there is this commitment and hostage-taking. Other religions must obviously not yield to the temptation to lump everybody together, much less practice discrimination. This is a matter that regards citizens. Faced with radicalisation messages, mainly spread on the Internet, I think citizens, the huge silent majority whose voices go unheard, must be given the means to express themselves on the Internet to develop a counter-message that would come from the people, from the bottom up. Lastly, we must work towards social cohesiveness, because we are very aware that unemployment, inequality and corruption are breeding grounds. They do not explain everything and surely justify nothing, but they are breeding grounds for deadly ideologies.

This will take time, but perhaps these tragic attacks will hasten a rise in awareness. What is happening in Europe and the Middle East shows that the start of a joint response might be under way.

Thierry de MONTBRIAL, Founder and Chairman of the WPC

Merci, Elisabeth.

Je crois qu’il y a beaucoup de sujets sur lesquels il faudra revenir, d’ailleurs pas nécessairement dans cette session. Je rappelle que nous aurons, dimanche, une session importante sur la question des réfugiés par exemple, qui est clairement liée à l’évolution au Moyen-Orient.

Il y a un point sur lequel j’aimerais que l’on revienne, tout à l’heure, dans cette session, c’est le processus de Vienne. Ce qui est assez remarquable, c’est que la presse, justement en raison des attentats du 13 novembre, n’a pas du tout parlé de ce qui s’est passé à Vienne le même week-end, alors que c’est probablement quelque chose d’important.