CHARLES-ÉDOUARD BOUÉE

Chief Executive Officer, Roland Berger Strategy Consultants

I think the link between companies and their mother country’s government is, paradoxically, of growing importance. And it is reciprocal. You just mentioned how being in the right country, that can and will bail you out, like France or the US or Japan, is important. But, conversely, we see how the GAFA (Google, Apple, Facebook, Amazon) in the USA or BAT (Baidu, Alibaba, Tencent) in China are used as a source of political leadership by their home countries. I am sure you have read or heard this statement from Barack Obama, which I personally found very striking, on February 15 at the White House Summit on Cybersecurity and Consumer Protection. He said: “We have owned the Internet, our companies have created it, expanded it and perfected it in a way that they cannot compete…”

On the one hand, especially in tough times companies need their countries to support them, and on the other hand, they should be used by governments as a source of global leadership. Understanding this is a challenge we have as Europeans. So far, some of our countries and some of our institutions have not yet completely understood that this is a two-way street. They have to support companies, because they provide employment and added-value of course, but they also should make the best of it, in terms of political, geopolitical or financial leadership.