



# HUBERT VÉDRINE

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Thank you, Dominique. It's always a pleasure to be back at these meetings initiated and originated by Thierry de Montbrial and which are always extremely interesting. I will come straight to the point. It is now evident that we are living in a multipolar world. I know, Joschka said to me a short while ago during lunch that in scientific terms it is absurd to say such a thing, because the earth can only have two poles. But here we are talking geopolitics. There is a multipolar reality and it is quite clear now that this was not the end of the story, that this was not the new American century, that this is not even the international community made up democracies and calm markets alone, that this multipolar world is multipolar competition against a background of population growth, against a background of rising uncontrolled migration, against a background of an ecological countdown, and I am only talking about the climate. There are plenty of other issues.

This multipolar competition can develop into cooperation if it is well managed and if the major players want that to happen. It can equally develop into tensions and confrontation. Let us look for example at what is taking place in the Asia Pacific region between the Chinese strategies and the American strategies. I will not expand on this point, but the question here is: what is the real strategy of the major players and the major poles? Is the United States calmly going to accept that its leadership in the world is only relative? This is something which is intolerable for the American people, which is almost unthinkable. One foresees three major difficulties of adaptation, of dissatisfaction among the American people with leaders who are obliged to draw inspiration from this reality. What are the Russians going to do to remain a major player or become one again?

Russia is put among the BRICs, which is a mistake because Russia is not an emerging country. It was the previous super power. That is something else. That is a category in itself. What can the Russians do to remain one of the players, one of the poles of this system? How far is China going to go? The whole world wants to know. What does it want to do with its power? Is there agreement or disagreement within the Chinese power structure on how to optimise this power, all of that by integrating itself in a new world game after perhaps changing its rules? How far? This is a question that all the others are asking. What will the historical and strategic choice of Japan be in relation to this Chinese reality? Japan does not really have many options in that respect. Do India and Brazil, also in the BRIC group, really have global strategies or are they merely large regional powers trying to make their mark?

I will note in passing that what is happening in the Arab world and is of very great interest — it is promising, exciting, worrying all at the same time — does not change this situation. Because, even in the medium term, one does not see the Arab world taking unified political stances that would make it one of the poles of this emerging system, although in the longer term undoubtedly. There remains the European question which is crucial. Beyond the ritual confrontations between those who are very federalist and who think that is the panacea, those who are a little bit federalist but not entirely, those who are not federalist at all, and beyond the agreement reached recently, how should the Euro zone be run? What do the Europeans want? One can ask the question. Do they simply want to protect themselves from the changes in the world that upset them? In the matter between the globalizers and the globalized, the European nations consider that they did not ask for anything and have not gained anything, unlike the emerging countries which, in fact, have nothing to lose and everything to gain.

Do the Europeans accept the idea that they must adapt whether they like it or not, as best they can? Do they want to have influence in the world, to be one of the poles of this multipolar world I am talking about? Is it that Europe is simply a large Switzerland? I am not criticising the Swiss system which has a lot of good qualities, but that is not the same plan. Is it Switzerland writ large or something else? This debate is still open. The Europeans do not agree among themselves. In addition, there is a considerable gulf between the elites in Europe and the people. I think that the European question is the main issue. When you take a quick look at the situation in the world, you realise that it was



not predictable. You cannot help noticing that, for years, the European elites and pro-Europeans have been unable to make themselves heard either by the people or by public opinion.

They are always being contradicted by votes or by referendums. There is a gulf that makes one wonder what will come next. This is a central question. For my part I think that there is a way to get round the ideological quarrels I have spoken about and that one can find a more effective arrangement for the European system which, beyond the intergovernmental, federalist or sovereignist system, etc. would be a more efficient arrangement. Maybe last week's agreement is a first step in this more efficient direction. The G20, the existence of which is a positive thing in itself, but which too many people confuse with a kind of super world government, which is not the case, the G20 is an enclosed space. It is an auditorium. It is like this auditorium here. It is the name of the auditorium. What happens in the world in the next few years is going to depend on alliances that may or may not be formed at this G20.

Are the Europeans united in the G20? Not always. Are they in agreement with the United States? Not always. Are they seeking agreement with Russia instead? That is more the case at the moment. Do the emerging countries agree among themselves? They do agree on what they are claiming. There is a kind of unionist harmony among the emerging countries for claiming a better status. Do they basically agree among themselves? No. They are also in competition with each other. Are steady, strong, stable alliances going to be forged or unstable ones changing from one issue to the other? This is what is happening at the moment to some degree. What follows in the important matter of governance which Thierry de Montbrial has been getting us to think about for some years depends largely on knowing if alliances are formed, if they carve up the world again into a hostile system or if they can go beyond that.

In particular, if we avoided the worst, we would have on one hand the bloc of western countries that led the world before, and on the other the bloc of emerging countries, and a kind of new paralysis of the new systems even if we are inventive institutionally. I think that everything must be done to ensure that the new forms of governments we are thinking about do not become victims of the bipolar or oversimplified systems that paralysed the forms of governance devised before. On paper, the system of 1945 was good. The UN system was good. The Security Council system was good. It was significant progress compared with the impotence of the League of Nations. But there are real geopolitical events which have subsequently paralysed them. We need to keep in mind that we are participating in the debate on the G20 of tomorrow, the new European system, etc.