



# THIERRY DE MONTBRIAL

## President and Founder of the World Policy Conference

The Honourable Prime Minister of Qatar,  
The Honourable Prime Minister of Turkey,  
The Honourable Minister of Foreign Affairs, former Prime Minister of the French Republic,  
Your Excellencies,  
Ladies and Gentlemen,  
Dear Friends,

The ninth edition of the *World Policy Conference* is beginning just twelve days after the election of the 45<sup>th</sup> President of the United States of America. The result of this election has stunned the world. The world, starting with the U.S. and European elites, blinded by certainties, was psychologically unprepared for Donald Trump's success. These elites, which include the vast majority of Western media, commentators and researchers, were unable to interpret the deep forces that have been steadily at work for a number of years in the United States, in both the Democratic and Republican parties. For them, neither Bernie Sanders nor Donald Trump really represented their America, that of Harvard and Washington or even Hollywood. Their accession to power was simply inconceivable. Like most of us, I have always admired the attachment of the American people to a Constitution which is the very sign of a strong identity. What is worrying today, is less the outcome of the November 8 election than the often desultory level of the electoral campaign that preceded it. It is also that the system allowed someone with no political experience to win. It signifies the possibility that Americans may be beginning to doubt their institutions. We are not there yet, but some people are evoking a crisis of democracy in the world's leading power.

The real crisis, only latent until Hilary Clinton's defeat, is not only American. It is western, if we mean by the West those parts of the world, mainly in Europe and in North America, which were the most influenced by the period of the Enlightenment and which created the ideal of liberal democracy. For a long time, liberal democracy appeared as a necessary condition for the long-term success of economic and social development. This perception is currently being undermined. The ideal of liberal democracy is less and less an inspiration for the rest of the world since the failures of the post-Soviet transition and the very badly named "Arab spring". This is a reality that must be faced. It is not only a geopolitical issue. Free-market globalisation has been immensely beneficial in all parts of the world. The Chinese, for example, are the first to acknowledge this in so far as it concerns them. But these benefits are not evenly distributed, and the ravages of poverty or displacement have also become global, including in the United States and in Europe. The anger against the explosion of inequalities, unearned income and corruption, is a general phenomenon that goes a long way towards explaining the rejection of the elites. It is no coincidence that the rise of illiberal democracies is frequently accompanied by measures to fight corruption.

Given this analysis, which from my standpoint it is difficult to contest, we other Westerners are less well placed than ever to tell the rest of the world what to do, even if we are entitled, and in my opinion, have a duty to defend our values and to correct our mistakes. There is a serious risk that the populist tendencies in the democracies will lead to the rise of nationalism and therefore to the rejection of Others, and to a return of a process of political and economic fragmentation of the world. The history of the twentieth century must caution us against the devastating consequences of such a process. Therefore, I believe it is essential to resist the protectionist temptation.

The goal of liberalising trade must be continued, on a basis of reciprocity, and ensuring that policies of compensation are established, designed to operate over the long term, in favour of the losing parties. It is not only a moral issue.

Economic and social disintegration is the most basic cause of uncontrolled migration, waves of refugees and of terrorism. Compensation of the losers must also become a common goal of fundamental importance for international policy. The problems in achieving this are clearly substantial.

I would like to add, in the same spirit, that European integration must continue. It is necessary to take stock of Brexit, and draw the lessons from it positively. Consolidation of the European project is a fundamental issue for Europeans themselves but also for the whole world which would suffer dramatically from a return to the past, just as it would suffer from possible upheavals in other parts of the world. I am thinking typically of China. A multipolar world must be based on strong and cooperative regional entities. Again, we must not forget the lessons of the tragedies of the twentieth century.

Consolidation of the European project is all the more important since the future of NATO is openly being questioned. During the election campaign, the candidate Donald Trump shocked the transatlantic elites by describing the organisation as obsolete. However, as early as 1991, i.e. as soon as the USSR broke up, the question of how the Atlantic Alliance could outlive the disappearance of the conditions for its establishment was asked. Whatever our thinking is regarding the causes of the deterioration of relations between the Western countries and Russia since the beginning of the militant extension of the Alliance eastwards, it was obvious that the nature of the geostrategic issues had changed for the United States and that sooner or later this would become apparent. The candidate Trump shook the small community of thinkers of NATO strategy by bluntly raising the issue. Trump as president will certainly tackle it with more restraint than in his campaign speeches. But there is little chance of seeing him taking up the torch of the neo-conservatives and singling out Russia as the main troublemaker in the world. All these developments could lead to a revision in the organisation of European security.

Among the other major issues, I will mention East Asia, where the leader of North Korea is playing increasingly dangerous games, with as a possible consequence, major destabilisation in the region; and of course the Middle East, whose future can only be re-established on solid bases if political agreement is reached between the main powers concerned, including of course the United States and Russia. Whether it relates to Europe in the broad sense, East Asia or the Middle East, only agreements developed within the framework of international law and therefore the United Nations will be viable. It is also within this framework that learning to co-manage planet Earth will continue, an endeavour in which we would like to believe President Trump will eventually take part.

A quarter of a century after the end of the cold war, the age is no longer conducive to dreaming of naïve globalisation and of the end of History. But we must learn to live better with globalisation as it really is, i.e. with a degree of interdependence that will deepen even more considerably, if one is to judge by the new waves of technological innovations that we can see on the horizon. Like the previous ones, these waves are rich with promises but also with hazards, in the absence of sufficiently robust governance to guarantee the structural stability of the international system as a whole.

To overcome the inevitable testing times ahead and to maintain a reasonably open world, we must all want this to be the case and work with each other in a spirit of listening and respect. We must resist the omnipresent temptation to export our ideologies. It is natural that each party will defend its own domestic interests. But each must also, without wanting to dominate, take its share of responsibility in co-managing its environment and, even, the entire planet. Better understanding and sharing this belief is the *raison d'être* of *the World Policy Conference*.

The programme of the ninth edition of the WPC is particularly rich, reflecting the complexity of the international situation. We are meeting this year in a region where, for reasons as much geopolitical as geoeconomic, is being



played out in part, the medium-term future of humanity. As founder and chairman of the *World Policy Conference*, I would like to thank the State of Qatar for having expressed its interest in our work by being our partner for this event. I would like to place it, with the agreement of you all, under the sign of Hope.