

# HUBERT VÉDRINE

## Former French Minister of Foreign Affairs

Thank you.

First, when we talk about the international “order”, are we talking about the order of 1945 or the “order”, in quotation marks, that supposedly emerged after the end of the Soviet Union, in other words since 1992? This already sounds ambiguous because since the end of the Soviet Union, there have been no equivalent negotiations, meetings, new texts, new organisations. There has been the West’s belief, in the broadest sense, that its ideas, which have just been recalled — democracy, free markets, unbridled liberalism, transformation of the global market economy into an all-out finance economy, etc. — would triumph throughout the world. To me, then, current events challenge not so much the present global order, which has never really functioned well anyway, but the hopes and illusions of Westerners and of all the globalised elites, in many countries worldwide, who played that card.

This leads me to the peoples’ revolt. In an article, I wrote about a voter “uprising”. Obviously, that can only happen where there is democracy and elections. It happened in the United States, but it can also happen in Europe. What they have in common, it seems to me, is that the working and middle classes are fed up. They feel economically left behind. The 2008 crisis and the excessive inequality brought about by globalisation play a major role. But there is also — I think, but we can talk about it — the sense of a loss of identity, sovereignty and security. The globalising elites of the past decades considered those ideas unmentionable, outdated, reactionary, dangerous. They worked hard, not to meet demands to slow or control the process, but to discount, discredit and disparage them. I think the people rebelling, for example by electing Trump or others elsewhere, are getting even. I believe we have to think about this point, including with regard to peoples and the European question.

On the issue of free trade, what are we seeing? How far can Trump, elected by the American middle classes, who have the feeling they have been pushed aside, of being the losers in the free trade game, go with his promises? Would de-globalisation be the right word to use if globalisation were just put on hold? If there’s no longer any chance of a Europe-United States deal, if the United States-Pacific deal falls through — an absurdity that would obviously benefit China — does that mean “de-globalisation”? The answer is open to discussion. It might just mean a slower pace, more control, more regulation. Perhaps the words to distinguish between these different phenomena have yet to be found.

Let’s not forget that we are here to talk about geopolitics. If our business was to focus on the environment, we would be asking different questions. We would be wondering if the “greening” of industry, agriculture, transport, construction, etc. will be fast enough to stop the countdown to catastrophe. So our approach to the global order may not cover every issue.

Let’s also recall that there are two gigantic clashes in Islam: the bitter conflict between Sunnis and Shiites, which will drag on until both sides are so worn down that they come to some sort of peace agreement in the Middle East or, in any case, cohabitation; and the offensive of a tiny minority, extremist, Salafist, Jihadist, call them what you will, that can lead to acts of terrorism, which mainly targets all the other Muslims who disagree with them. That must not be forgotten because the timetable, the chronology is different from the one Kevin Rudd mentioned. The advocates of globalisation, systematic liberalisation, thought it would dissolve identities and long-standing conflicts. That is clearly not the case. So we have to wonder if all that can be taken back under control.

Now let's take the example of Trump. His election was a kind of earthquake that left many people stunned. It stupefied some Westerners, especially in the media. Why was something predictable, imaginable, in any case possible, *unthinkable*? It was unthinkable for ideological, perhaps dogmatic reasons, perhaps a bit like religions that are incapable of radically challenging their beliefs. Where will it lead us? We will see. We cannot talk about what Trump will really do because we just do not know, but we have got to keep a close eye on what the reactions and knock-on effects will be of Trump-Russia, Trump-China, Trump-trade, Trump-Europe. It's time to get over the shock in order to think and organise.

One of the key questions Europeans face in the age of Trump is whether they will settle for claiming custodianship of "values". That is the job President Obama gave to Mrs. Merkel, who fit the bill. Or will Europeans be roused to defend their interests? For example, Trump says he wants to scrap the Paris climate agreement. Either the other countries despair and say "how tragic", or they say, "the United States is out, but we are still in; they do not want to implement the agreement on Iran, but we will", etc. So Europeans and many major United States allies need to make choices. They can wait, quivering, to see what Trump will do, hoping he will become more pragmatic. Or they can seize this historic opportunity to take control of their destiny. If that is what they do, the new order, which was supposedly collapsing, would, on the contrary, become an opportunity to build, perhaps, a different order, perhaps even safer than the one we have lived in for the past 25 years. Anything is possible.

As far as Trump is concerned, we must be careful about words. When he said what he said about trade deals, and Hillary Clinton had to follow his lead, the word "isolationism" was almost always used. I think that term is inaccurate. Nothing in Trump's policy suggests that the United States wants to cut itself off from the rest of the world. On the other hand, there are signs of brutality and selfishness. But careful, a power's old-fashioned, sacrosanct selfishness, the desire to impose solutions or make deals based on self-interest, must not be confused with isolationism. By and large, I think most of the words used in the Western-globalised media fall short of describing what is happening, defining the risks and determining the right responses.

In my opinion, the main concern is knowing whether Europeans will react or, like children, worry and wait to see what happens. This may be the time to provide a European response, including to control globalisation, including to maintain economic liberalism, but with rules, etc. If Europeans are not capable of that, I do not know who will be in the new circumstances.

#### **Bertrand COLLOMB**

On reviendra sur l'Europe mais, dans le fond, vous nous invitez un peu à suspendre notre jugement.

#### **Hubert VEDRINE**

Plutôt à ne pas attendre pour déterminer assez vite ce que nous voulons, nous, pas simplement attendre, mais fixer les éléments vitaux pour nous, pour recréer ce fameux nouvel ordre qui est censé avoir disparu.

#### **Bertrand COLLOMB**

Merci.