



# RICHARD BURT

Managing Director, McLarty Associates; Former US Ambassador to Germany

## Ali ASLAN

The first member has held many important positions, including the Assistant Secretary of State for European Affairs at the State Department. He also served as ambassador to Germany during a very critical time, 1985 to 1989, and currently he is the managing director of McLarty Associates, based in Washington D.C. Richard Burt, you served in Germany as ambassador and worked on the EU quite a bit; we are very curious to hear your opening statements on the current state of the EU.

## Richard BURT

I will make a few, hopefully provocative, points to get a discussion going. I will begin by reminding some of you who at least read the *Wall Street Journal* of a column that was published after a visit to Europe by Donald Trump last summer. It was written by H.R. McMaster, the President's national security advisor, and Gary Cohn, who chairs something called the National Economic Council, and the title of the article was: 'America First Does Not Mean America Alone.' I am not sure whether or not I agree with that, but I do think that America first perhaps means Europe alone.

We are going through a really crucial and historical change in which the message from Washington to Europe and the EU is now: 'You are on your own.' Thinking back, both through the immediate post-war period, the Cold War period and the aftermath of the Cold War, the one stabilising influence in international politics was the US-European relationship. That has changed, and it has probably changed for good.

Thinking back to examples of special relationships, not only between the US and Britain but also the remarkable relationships that go back to the 1950s between Eisenhower and Konrad Adenauer, between Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher, between Tony Blair and his relationships both with Bill Clinton and George W. Bush, and the relationships more recently between Angela Merkel and Barack Obama, there is no such relationship now between any major European leader and Donald Trump. American policy becomes less focused on Western values and shared values and more on transactionalism, and there is an emphasis in American policy on India, China, East Asia and South Asia and not the US-EU relationship. This puts the Europeans, and the EU in particular, in a difficult position.

It is a scary world for Europeans, on the one hand, without the US as a partner, but on the other hand it can also be a force for change in Europe, an invigorating period for Europe, to take on new responsibilities and new leadership. However, that fundamental shift away from the transatlantic relationship being the centrepiece of international relations will pose real pressures and challenges not only for Brussels and the Brussels-based institutions but also the major European players.

Secondly, that means that Europe has to strengthen itself. We all recognise the importance of coming to grips with the economic challenges, fixing the European monetary system, finding a way to deal with some persistent European issues like growth, and some progress has been made in those areas, but one thing I would emphasise is the importance of strengthening and building the European defence pillar. It was interesting to me that, when Trump was in Europe last summer, the big debate was whether the Europeans would agree to the 2% increase in defence; that to me is the wrong way to cast the issue. Europeans should not think of defence spending as a way of placating the Americans. The Europeans need to think about defence spending and strengthening their defence to play a bigger role in international politics. There is some consensus beginning to emerge along those lines, and as an American I would applaud an effort to strengthen European security and defence.

Thirdly, Europe needs a common strategy for regulating and protecting its borders. I am not talking about a Trumpian wall through Europe, but I am talking about the need to have a Europe-wide immigration strategy, one which is not implemented on a national basis but on an EU basis. More has to be done in this area. The problem of immigration has



loomed large recently, particularly in places like Eastern Europe, and only a Europe-wide approach to dealing with controlling and protecting the border is the solution.

My penultimate point has to do with the need to do something about the unruly Eastern Europeans. Here I am not just pointing at Poland but at Hungary and at some other newer members of the EU in the east. Some kind of agreement needs to be reached in Brussels to find a way of demonstrating that there are costs associated with not living up to the standards and rules of the EU, because if the EU fails to do this, it faces potential disintegration.

I will finish by saying that I am basically an optimist about Europe for three reasons. First of all, I am very pleased to see the results of the recent German elections. I am relieved that, even though there are tough coalition discussions going on in Berlin today, Angela Merkel has been returned to power; she has played a very important leadership role. That leads to the second aspect, which is the result of the elections in France. The Germans now potentially have a French partner, which could create a revitalised Franco-German alliance within the EU, which historically has always been the vital engine of growth and modernity in Europe.

That leads to my third and final point. Regarding all the debate and discussion with London about how Brexit will proceed, and how the British will or will not successfully negotiate leaving the EU, I secretly believe that, in the end, Britain will not leave Europe.

#### **Ali ASLAN**

The breaking news from Marrakech is that Britain is no longer leaving the EU. Many thanks for your opening remarks, which gave us a lot of food for thought, in that the special relationship between the US and the EU will not exist as it used to be, perhaps an opportunity for Europe to become more independent and grow up, if you will, particularly on the security front. You mentioned a piece in the *Wall Street Journal*, a fine newspaper.