



# HUBERT VEDRINE

Former Minister of Foreign Affairs of France

## Steven ERLANGER

So we have roughly eighty minutes so the first thing I want to do is just ask the panelists when they think about the problems of the European Union today, what are the one or two issues – only one or two issues, I don't want them to talk for more than two or three minutes – that seem most prominent to them, and I thought I would start at the other end with the former French Foreign Minister, Mr. Hubert Védrine.

## Hubert VÉDRINE

We are supposed to be talking about European uncertainties—actually, uncertainties *between* Europeans. I think a distinction must be made between immediate, short-term uncertainties and deep, structural, perhaps even vital uncertainties, and then ponder what to do. I won't go into any details. These are just outlines.

Short-term uncertainties abound. How will the new Commission be made up? Whom will France nominate to replace Mrs. Goulard, who never should have been nominated in the first place? How will it operate? How will the balance of power be established between the Parliament, which wants to impose its supremacy, and the other institutions? What will Europe do if Trump is re-elected, or if somebody else becomes president? What will Europe do about Putin, China, all the chaos in the Middle East, migration issues, etc.? There are many questions.

What will Europe do about the risk of a technological gap? These questions jump out at us as soon as we open up a newspaper or turn on the television.

I think there are even deeper, structural, if not existential, uncertainties behind them. The first is, do we want to build the sort of powerful Europe people have been long asking for but that frightens many Europeans, even those affected by the current chaos?

Second, will the Europe we are talking about succeed in winning back the working and middle classes that have turned away from globalization and Europe? The answer is not a foregone conclusion.

Third, will Europe manage to protect itself from the global crisis of representative democracy at a time when people no longer want to be represented? They elect somebody and three days later they are already unhappy. It's becoming almost impossible to manage modern democracies, and not just in Europe. Will Europe manage to find a convincing answer to that problem?

Will it manage to find, by negotiating with the departure and transit countries, an intelligent, rational, humane way to manage migratory flows? That is less short-term. It is here to stay.

In dealing with short-term challenges, when asking yourselves, "*What can we do about these problems?*", to which the ecological countdown, which affects the whole world and not just Europe, must be added, I suggest that you distinguish between answers having to do with the immediate present and deeper issues that require restoring the credibility and legitimacy of democratic systems.

I will end on multilateralism. It's very well and good to sing the praises of liberalism and democracy, as long as it works. *Does it work?* This is not a question of religion or values! The daunting challenge to all the democracies, especially in Europe, which lectures the rest of the world on this subject, is to make sure it works, to show peoples that they must adopt this system, even a modified version of it.



**Steven ERLANGER**

*Merci Monsieur le Ministre.* Thank you for laying out these questions and making this important distinction between the pressing issues and the ones that are structural because I hope we will have time to really get to both.