

DEBATE

Thierry de Montbrial

Patrick, you clearly put much more stress on the responsibility of individual governments than Mr. Fabius does: 60% of the world's oil production is in the hands of states. This is an astonishing figure. Deforestation is also a matter of States, governments and international relations in the sense of inter-State relations, in other words the most classic conception of international relations plus international law, which, as everyone knows, has no teeth. It is a commonly used term that is not entirely pejorative.

Laurent, I saw you making a distinguished pout.

Laurent Fabius

One of the friendliest ways to get the upper hand in a debate is to slightly caricature the other's position. No, there is not an idealist, namely me, on one side and a pragmatist, represented by one of the three people on this stage, on the other. I will convince you of that quite easily. If the people who negotiated the Paris Agreement and their chairman, namely me, had not been pragmatic about finding common ground with the Chinese, the Indians, the Americans, the small island States and the Europeans, it is unlikely that every State in the world would have signed it. We are therefore both wilful and pragmatic. That is how I see it.

Mr. Pouyanné is right on the key role of coal. It is not easy to curtail the use of coal but it is necessary. Here is a technical point. A coal-fired power station lasts between 40 and 50 years. The average age of Asia's coal-fired power plants is 11 years! In my introductory remarks I said that if all the coal-fired plants in the pipeline received financing, we would obviously have to forget about these targets. Diplomacy, economic relations, trade and financial decisions must be geared towards reducing the use of coal. That does not mean we have to have gas everywhere. Gas emits less CO₂ than coal but it still emits. The issue, which you are quite right to imply, is our development model. Raising this point is not a rejection of pragmatism. We obviously will not be able to stop the current trend and do what is desirable for humanity's survival without changing many development parameters.

What Mr. Pouyanné said on the difference in public awareness between developed and developing countries is probably statistically true, but I am not sure we should rely on it to say that as soon as public opinion cannot be expressed, no changes must be made in the energy mix. That would penalise these populations twice. I fully recognise the problem. Mr. Pouyanné, an astute observer, made a remark that I myself, who chaired the Paris Agreement conference, made. It is true that the agreement calls for carbon neutrality within the second half of this century. Then the target date was moved up to 2050. What strikes me is that when we look at the famous NDCs, the various countries' commitments, they are not keeping their word. Many companies say they would have signed the Paris Agreement or that they are committed to net zero emissions by 2050. Fine, but when we look at their programme—and this applies to the major energy companies—they are not keeping their COP 21 commitments. There must therefore be some general questioning.

Lastly, Mr. Pouyanné said it is not surprising that the current track is 3°C, since when the NDCs published in 2015 were added up, it was already at 3°C. When we signed the Paris Agreement, we added up the NDCs and got 3°C. Thanks to compliance with the agreement—29 articles and 140 paragraphs of decisions—we said that the current trend is +3°C, but thanks to the NDCs, which need to be improved little by little, we are going back down to 2°C, or even 1.5°C. The current dramatic aspect means that UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres has just brought all the countries together in New York to say, "Since you have to give your new commitments next year, give them now." There were three categories. Most small and some medium-sized States said they would comply with the Paris Agreement and presented their new commitments or explained their determination to improve them next year (about 60 States out of 195). The second category is made up of States that didn't express themselves, including such non-

negligible ones as the United States, Russia, Argentina and Brazil. They suggested that there is no way they will propose new NDCs, and therefore upgrade them. A third group comprises large countries that have spoken out to say things that were already known, and not to increase their commitments. We are no longer in compliance with the Paris Agreement and we are therefore drifting away from the 2°C or 1.5°C target and from what had prevailed to allow us to move from the 3°C trend to the 2°C or 1.5°C trend. On the contrary, we are even moving towards 3.5°C or even 4 or 5°C. The COP 25 in December 2019 will have to come back to these aspects but it is not going well. On the one hand, as I said, all the players must mobilise, and not just on the one hand governments and on the other hand companies, whose only goal would be profitability, etc. It has to be everybody.

The other day I read an interesting piece comparing President Kennedy's space programme and the climate challenge. In 1962, he pulled out all the stops. seven years later an American was on the moon, and it was not even vital for humanity's survival

Thierry de Montbrial

But there was a leader then.

Laurent Fabius

Exactly. Today, when the very life of a part of humanity is at stake, we are unable to move forward. What is the difference? First of all, there was a leader, the American president, who with his decision could harness the necessary resources. The second major difference is that no economic or financial interests were threatened. The third is that it did not require a number of people to change their way of life. Today, the fight against climate change is leading to profound and therefore difficult changes.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you, Laurent. The end of your talk reminds me of what President Macron said the other day about fighting terrorism. He used more or less the same words you just did: "It is everyone's business. Everyone must pitch in."

Patrick Pouyanné

I would just like to add one point. I am not yet ready to sign a piece of paper saying that Total will be neutral by 2050. I refuse to sign any commitment to a future target without knowing how to reach it. Many states say they will be neutral by 2040 or 2050. The question is not where we will be in 25 years' time, but what we must do today. The real debate is hidden. By making collective commitments to 2040 or 2050, we think we are satisfying the young people who go out on the streets and tell us we are irresponsible. The crux of the matter is the path we are on today. I have committed Total to reducing our products' carbon content by 15% over the next decade. If we do that, we'll be on track to what we would have to do collectively to reach 2°. That is the slope, not the absolute value, because Total produces oil and gas, but also renewable electricity. If we can reach a 15% reduction, we will be on the right track. I am talking about 2030 because that is as far I can see. It is in our hands. We are making decisions. Total is making a shift from Big Oil to Big Energy. We are becoming a power company. However, I do not know what is going to happen in 2040 or 2050. The world is moving. Technology is changing. After 2030, we said we would drop to between 25 and 40%, and we are told we would no longer be on the 2°C trajectory. But again, I do not know what will happen by then.

Of course, I could make a number of stakeholders happy by signing a document aiming at neutrality by 2050, but today there is a trend that I think can finally be collectively responsible in terms of governance, a form of collective incantation, to believe, because all the leaders are repeating that we will be neutral by 2050 and we will have a world at 1.5°, that this is going to happen. The question is to act today and I think there is little difference between Mr. Fabius and me on this point.

Thierry de Montbrial

I would like to remind you that there will also be an energy workshop this afternoon. Unfortunately, we are already behind schedule.



I would just like to add a footnote: The Earth began without man and will end without man. In the meantime, 4G, 5G, 18G and others will have come and gone. I think it would be worth mentioning a considerable source of energy consumption that has not been yet: digital technology. We do not realise that it consumes huge amounts of energy.

Laurent Fabius

If my memory serves me right, today digital technology accounts for between 3 and 4% of CO₂ emissions. That is more than air or maritime transport. If the use of digital technology keeps rising at the current pace, the figure could reach 8%. So that is an additional challenge.

Patrick Pouyanné

It would be amusing to ask the young people out in the streets today if they are willing to give up streaming. In a company like Total, our most expensive computer use is streaming videos on YouTube. If you stop doing that, you can sharply reduce greenhouse gas emissions connected to digital technology. Is this coherent or contradictory?

Laurent Fabius

I have always jokingly said that an 18th article should have been added to the famous French Declaration of the Rights of Man and of the Citizen of 1789, which has 17 of them: the right to contradict. Kidding aside, how the movement expresses itself can certainly be questioned, but I do not agree with criticising youth. I was at the UN when Greta Thunberg spoke, but I think we have to go beyond that. The young people expressing themselves today are part of a movement that is fundamentally fair: they are calling for urgent and profound action; they are pointing out that with our current development models we are heading off a cliff. They are right. On the other hand, young people cannot express themselves everywhere, because their demonstrations would be banned and even unimaginable in some countries. They also play a role in raising their parents and grandparents' awareness. Just a word on taxing carbon: climate change and inequality cannot be separated, nationally or globally. This is a big part of the future. No carbon taxation is possible without fiscal and social support for the regions and the people affected, who have no choice. I repeat: it is a race against time. The stakes are therefore high.

Thierry de Montbrial

I also have a right to contradict, and fortunately there is a leader, at least at this conference. I must unfortunately end this exciting discussion. Thank you both very much.