

AMIR BEN YAHMED

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Welcome, ladies and gentlemen. Good afternoon. My name is Amir Ben Yahmed. I am the CEO of the Jeune Afrique Media Group and Chairman of the Africa CEO Forum.

The World Policy Conference and Thierry de Montbrial have kindly asked me to chair this panel. It is a very big responsibility, especially since we are the closing panel after three days of heated debate. We will try to answer as simply as possible a question that is not so simple to answer.

It is not simple because, first, from Johannesburg to Alger, from Nairobi to Lagos, these countries have different issues, different challenges. They are also facing a new geopolitical landscape that is going to shape the world for the coming decades and we still have some difficulties to understand how it will affect Africa.

We also have some crosscutting issues, such as climate change or artificial intelligence that will be critical to the standing of Africa and the rest of the world.

It is a very complicated question to answer, but it is a very important one, probably because Africa has one of the most important targets in terms of development goals. However, it also has some of the most promising resources to capitalize on to reach these targets.

They have renewable energy, they have minerals and, most importantly, they have human resources. We have spoken a lot about the demographic dividend. Africa is finally capitalizing on it.

To answer this difficult question, we have a great line-up of experts, and I will switch to French now because most of our panelists are French-speaking. I will start by introducing Lionel Zinsou.

Lionel Zinsou is the Co-Chair of SouthBridge. It is one of the leading merchant banks dedicated to Africa. Lionel Zinsou was head of one of Africa's largest investment funds, PAI Partners, and has also had a significant political career. You were Prime Minister of Benin.

On his left is Bertrand Badré. Bertrand, you founded and lead Blue Like an Orange Sustainable Capital, an impactful investment fund. You've also been a leader in the World Bank Group, serving as its Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer.

General Francis Béhanzin will be our security expert today. You will have this heavy responsibility. You are a security issues specialist, a former ECOWAS Commissioner for



Political Affairs and now chairman of the World Network of Security and Defence Professionals for the Prevention and Combating of Terrorism.

Jean-Michel Severino is on your left. You founded I&P, Investisseurs & Partenaires, one of Africa's oldest private equity firms focusing on small and medium-sized enterprises. For almost 10 years, you were Chief Executive Officer of the French Development Agency.

And our last expert, Robert Dossou, will talk to us about governance, his area of expertise. You are a lawyer at both the Paris and Cotonou Bars. You are President of the African Association of International Law and you have also had a political career, having been Benin's Minister of Planning and Minister of Foreign Affairs. We have two very distinguished guests from Benin.

Welcome to all. Thank you for your participation. You have a heavy responsibility in answering this highly complex question. Some of the moderators imposed a seven- to 10-minute time limit. I am going to be a bit stricter and request a four-minute time limit to exchange views and come back to the many issues that make up this question.

We will start with a quick general question. Since the 2000s, Africa has had brisk growth, high potential and a booming private sector. This narrative has been backed up by excellent figures that Lionel will be able to tell us, because I know he can recite everything by heart from the 2000s right up to Covid. Covid marked a break, almost a reversal, in the narrative, since we now face a situation where security issues are on the rise. We have had five coups, mainly in French-speaking countries, conflicts, and civil wars in Sudan and Ethiopia. The narrative is once again marred by setbacks in governance, security and the economy, since we are now in a global downturn where the issue is how Africa will continue financing its development.

So I would like to ask each of you a fairly simple general question. What is your current assessment of the continent? What is your perception of how the narrative is shifting? Are we in a growth crisis? Are we in a pause, a kind of transition period? How can you explain what you see as the situation on the continent today?