

GÉRARD MESTRALLET

Special Envoy of the French President for IMEC

Good afternoon. Thank you, Thierry, for inviting me and thank you also for dedicating a full session to the IMEC, the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor. I am Gérard Mestrallet. I am the Special envoy of the French President, Emmanuel Macron, for IMEC. I am not a diplomat. I have an industrial business background. I have been the CEO of companies like GDF Suez (ENGIE) for more than 20 years, involved in energy and the environment.

We have a small panel, small in size, but thanks to my colleagues, very high level. My colleagues are Anurag Varma and Gidon Bromberg. Anurag is Senior Vice President and Head of Public Affairs and Business Development for Adani North America, part of India's largest infrastructure and logistics conglomerate. In this capacity, Anurag shapes the company's partnerships and strategic growth in North America. Previously, he was Vice President and Head of Global Government and Public Affairs of Infosys. He is currently based in Washington.

Gidon Bromberg is a co-founder and co-director of EcoPeace Middle East. EcoPeace is a unique regional environmental peace-building organization founded in 1994. This organization was nominated in 2024 for the Nobel Peace Prize. Gidon has served as its co-director for three decades. He is an attorney by profession. He has been immersed in the environmental peace-building world for over 30 years and he has written extensively on the relationship between issues and water in the Middle East peace. He has presented on these issues before the United States Security Council, the United Nations Climate Summit, the US Congress and the European Parliament.

I will start by describing what IMEC is. IMEC was created by an agreement, an MOU, signed in September 2023 in New Delhi on the sidelines of the G20. This agreement was signed by eight chiefs of state or chiefs of government: Mr. Modi for India, Mohammed bin Salman for Saudi Arabia, Mohammed bin Zayed for the Emirates, and with four signatories in Europe, namely President Macron for France, Chancellor Scholz for Germany, Prime Minister Meloni for Italy and Mrs. Von der Leyen for the European Union, which is a member as such, and also Joe Biden. It is an economic and logistics corridor. It aims to develop and enhance the connectivity between the three continents: India, the Middle East and Europe. IMEC will be one of the major infrastructure projects of the 21st century. Total investment requirements could amount to \$500 billion, although future feasibility studies will enable us to determine a more precise amount.

What is it physically? Physically, the corridor will transport goods by containers. This will therefore imply ships, ports and railways. It will also transport energy; electricity, green electricity, high-voltage lines, green hydrogen. By the way, after the discussions we have just

seen in the previous panel, I would like to mention that IMEC will be the most important corridor for green hydrogen because it will connect the most important consuming zone and the most important producing zone. The producers of green hydrogen will be in India, and perhaps you could mention later on India's immense project in the production of green hydrogen. India, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Oman, but also Egypt along the Suez Canal, and Jordan – this zone will produce very important quantities of green hydrogen, and Europe has decided to import massive quantities of green hydrogen. Therefore, IMEC will be the link between them. In IMEC, there will also be transport of digital data using fiber optics.

As you see on the map, there will be three legs. The first leg is between India and the southeast of the Arabic continent. It will be a maritime leg. The second section between, say, Jebel Ali, for example, but it will not be only one port in Dubai, and the exit port, Haifa, will be a terrestrial land leg going through Jordan and Israel. Jordan and Israel are not signatory states because they are not members of the G20, so they were not present in New Delhi, but they are explicitly mentioned in the press release issued by the eight chiefs of state. On this second leg there will be trains, high-voltage lines, hydrogen pipes and fiber optic cables. The third one is also a maritime leg from Haifa, which is so far the main exit port to the Mediterranean Sea, to Marseille, which we want to privilege. Marseille is already today a world leading digital hub. It will become a hub for hydrogen, with pipes going to the north of Europe. Of course, there will also be other ports, like Trieste in Italy, with Italy being a member of IMEC, and Piraeus in Greece, but Greece is not a member of IMEC. Also, Piraeus is owned by the Chinese.

There are three geostrategic objectives, which explains the presence of the United States. First, the corridor stops in Europe. It does not cross over the Atlantic. Nevertheless, this project is strongly supported by the United States. Firstly, it is a way to implement the Abraham Accords, in order to normalize the relationship between Israel and the Arab countries, by creating a physical link. Secondly, it reinforces the links between the Occident and India. It is very important for the United States and for Europe to increase the relationship and the friendship between Europe and India. Thirdly, the objective is to create additional prosperity all along the corridor.

Where are we today? First, it is important to mention that only three weeks after the signature in New Delhi, Hamas attacked Israel. It was October 7. Therefore, of course, for some countries, the priorities have changed in the Middle East, and that will be the case during the war in Gaza. Thus far, I am the only special envoy. It is not always easy to discuss with myself. There are people in charge of IMEC in all the other countries, but they are very high-level ministers or national security advisers. They are very important people who cannot allocate an important part of their time to IMEC. There are therefore lots of bilateral exchanges. For example, there is a trilateral diplomatic dialogue between India, the UAE and France: IMEC is now one of the axes of this strategic dialogue. However, so far there is not yet a collective organization, but that is the project that we have to create: a steering committee gathering all of the Sherpas when they are appointed. Therefore, we clearly need a governance body. This governance body will gather the eight representatives first, and then the two other countries that are mentioned in the agreement, plus, in our mind, Egypt and Oman. That is the first element, the first step.



Secondly, there are lots of studies to be launched, studies for the identification of the infrastructures, where they are, what their efficiencies and capacities are, whether we should increase the capacities of the ports. Some terrestrial infrastructures do not yet exist in the Arabic peninsula, so they have to be done. What is the best track? There will be a central track, normally to Haifa, but we can imagine other alternative tracks to Jordan, to Egypt, or why not to Lebanon? This is the second step that we want to put in place.

The third step is to prepare the day after. What I mean is that IMEC will create prosperity and growth around the track. We will create special economic zones, industrial zones, logistics zones, in order to have jobs, growth and prosperity, mainly in the hinterland of the ports. That will be the case in India, that will be the case in Marseille, and that is mainly already the case in Dubai and Abu Dhabi, but it can be developed, and also it will be the case in Haifa. The hinterland of Haifa will strongly benefit from IMEC, and what is the hinterland of Haifa? It is Israel, of course. It is Jordan, south of Lebanon – it is close to the border – and also Palestine. Therefore, we should prepare the case of IMEC being a strong element for the day after. I will stop here.