

SPEAKERS' DEBATE

Gérard Mestrallet, Special Envoy of the French President for IMEC

We wanted, through this panel, to present to you the point of view of big global business with Adani, the point of view of local civil society, with people of goodwill, people willing to restore the dignity of the local people living there, and the point of view of policymakers. Therefore, the three views are gathered in order to support IMEC with three different origins. In the end, all three are strongly supporting IMEC. Now, we will continue the question, and I will come back to you, Anurag. You are based in Washington, DC. You work in the field of public affairs, international institutional relations. We know that this project, IMEC, has been strongly supported by the Biden Administration and by Joe Biden himself. How do you see the new Trump administration as regards to IMEC?

Anurag Varma, Senior Vice President of the Adani Group

That is an amazing question. What I loved is our speaker from about two hours ago, the Speaker of the US House of Representatives, Kevin McCarthy. He kept being asked about, "What do you think of Trump's view on this and Trump's view on that?" He answered every question by beginning with a smile and specified "that is how we all view it in Washington." "What does Trump think about this?" You smile because no one actually knows. What we do know is that Trump is a dealmaker. He is transactional, and like many world leaders, he is about his country first. The simple view is if we just hire American construction companies, he will be fully supportive. However, it is a little bit more complicated than that with him.

He will be looking at the flow of American goods across the world. If it is good for American exports, number one, he will be supportive. Number two is the tricky question. He has a view that one of the things America needs to build is a supply chain that is not reliant on China. As a private company, Adani, we have no view on that. Our view is to look for opportunities to build and construct. However, Mr. Trump has made it clear that he wants to diversify the supply chain away from China-only solutions. Many times, people talk about the Belt and Road Initiative and such. What we are building through IMEC is an alternative supply chain to what already exists, and Mr. Trump will be supportive of something like that. Whereas a number of Biden administration priorities may fall aside, I really do not think IMEC will. I think he will absolutely see that it falls squarely within his global trade objectives.

Gérard Mestrallet

We were in Washington very recently after the elections and we can confirm that what is in the air, in the atmosphere, as I would say, is twofold. First, there is the idea to reinforce the links with India and diversify the supply chain. It is positive. Sometimes in the US, this project is

presented as a competitor to the Belt and Road Initiative. We do not want to consider it that way as we are against no one. We are building something new, something positive, which will create value and create prosperity. In the end, the market will decide.

The second argument is the fact that, as I mentioned, this project will create a physical link between Israel, Saudi Arabia, the Emirates, Jordan and Oman. It is therefore the direct implementation of the Abraham Accords, which were signed six years ago by the Trump administration. Therefore, there has been continuity from Trump signing the Abraham Accords and then Biden implementing them through IMEC. Of course, this would be a positive argument. Nevertheless, no one knows. Gidon, I would like to ask you what the political buy-in is. Which countries, so far, support the vision of IMEC as a key project for peace and for prosperity?

Gidon Bromberg

Together with my Palestinian and Jordanian directors, we have travelled. We have presented the vision of the Peace Triangle addition to IMEC in the White House under the Biden administration, to the cabinet of Amos Hochstein. We have presented it to the cabinet of President von der Leyen of the European Union, to the foreign minister, to other DGs in Europe and to the German government. In the initial response, there was a lot of interest, but clearly saying, "Okay, but we are not there yet, we are not at the day after." We are coming and saying, "Well, to get to the day after, we need to build these alliances of the private sector, of civil society, of government leadership." German government funding has recently given us a grant to do a study on the export of renewables from the Middle East to Europe, and it is actually being done by an Emirati company, Qamar Energy, a leading energy consultant.

We are invited and sponsored to present the results of that study in February, in Brussels, before von der Leyen's cabinet, the new foreign ministry, the new DG MED, and we are extremely excited. We are going to be working, of course, with France on, again, how to utilize the studies that are being produced. A private foundation is funding a second study on the large-scale desalination in Gaza that would be part of Jordan's water security. The Italian government is supporting a delegation from EcoPeace, together with Italian civil society, to think together and to write policy papers in support of IMEC and in support of the role that IMEC can lead in the agenda. Maybe most significantly, we are seeing interest from the G7 countries to perhaps incorporate IMEC and its potential for peace building within next year's G7 agenda. Therefore, we come with real hope.

In our own governments, we have heard positive responses from all three at different stages, on different aspects. Do not expect our three governments to agree outright. That is not reasonable given the current trauma that our region is in. That is why we need the leadership of the eight founding partners of IMEC to champion the incorporation of peace, of peace building, into this IMEC model and to bring on board, together, inviting Israel, Jordan and Palestine to actually become signatories of the IMEC MOU that was signed back in September of last year.

Gérard Mestrallet

Thank you, Gidon. We have two minutes left. As a matter of conclusion, I would first like to add an element, which is the approach of the EU. We have been discussing this with Brussels and there is an EU initiative called the Global Gateway. The Global Gateway aims at creating connectivity between the EU as a whole and some friendly countries or friendly regions. It should concern five sectors; transport, digital, energy, and education and health, which IMEC is not concerned with. There is an envelope of EUR 300 billion for the Global Gateway, and the approach is to consider in the coming months IMEC as a flagship project of the Global Gateway, and therefore to have the full support of all the European Commission and all the EU. That will be in the processes of the EU, which are very complex, a way to have them on board directly and completely. Having said that, we must conclude. I would say that you have heard very interesting explanations from my colleagues. I consider that in the short term IMEC should be a concept for the day after. In the long run, IMEC should be one of the most important infrastructure projects and connectivity projects for the century. Thank you very much.