

SPEAKERS' DEBATE

Thierry de Montbrial, Founder and Executive Chairman of Ifri and the WPC

Thank you very much. Now, I want to stress the fact that in history many things which should not have happened happen, which is one more reason to reinforce as much as possible governance, global governance. This now leads me to another question for the three of you. As we saw in the previous session with our Chinese friend, Qiao Yide, it may be impossible to reconcile the views, the approaches on global governance, even in a relatively narrow field, huge in itself, which is the economic governance. Yide told us explicitly that it might be impossible, so my question, relating this to the current session, is there not a risk with the concept of multi-vector policy to gradually move towards, in fact, conflicting approaches to governance, which would not be possible to reconcile, and related to that the concept of medium middle powers?

I am very glad, by the way, that Kazakhstan is emphasizing so much this concept of middle countries, which has actually been at the core of the approach of the WPC since the beginning, you know, middle powers. To rephrase my question positively to the three of you, how can middle powers play a constructive role, I would say, to force bigger powers to take a more reasonable approach, a more diplomatic approach to the major issues of the world? Let us start with Madam Brnabić.

Ana Brnabić, Speaker of the National Assembly of the Republic of Serbia

It is a tough question, and I am not sure that it is even possible. It certainly does not depend on us. I can tell you that Serbia has managed to position itself as the country which is, I think, perceived as a country that can actually build bridges. If you look only at this year, 2024, for a country which has only 6.8 million people, we hosted the president of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, and for the second time in the past 10 years. We have hosted the president of France, Emmanuel Macron. We have hosted the Chancellor of Germany, Olaf Scholz. We have hosted the president of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen. Our president had a telephone conversation with the president of the Russian Federation, Vladimir Putin. We have hosted the president of Kazakhstan, Mr. Tokayev; the president of the United Arab Emirates, Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan; the president of Türkiye, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, only in 2024, and many other world leaders, which is quite unconventional, I would say.

However, that might be, I think, the answer to your question, which is that, yes, I think when you have such a wide gap between different world powers, perhaps sometimes they look for countries, and hopefully will do so even more in the future, that do talk to everyone to come in and say, 'Okay, can you tell us what this other person thinks, what this other country thinks?

How can we actually establish the communication channels again?’ Because at the end of the day, any war – any war – needs to end by some kind of a dialogue. I have no idea whether communication channels are currently open between different conflicting warring sides. I hope that there are, but it seems that sometimes, actually, perhaps for the first time in history, there are no communication channels open. That is a frightening thought, I would say, so perhaps some of us can serve as a bridge between all of these different sides.

Now, going forward, whether the situation will become even more complex, as tended to happen in the first term of President Trump, when there was actually a trade war between the EU and the United States, and everyone else, including Serbia, as an EU accession country, suffered, it remains to be seen. Additionally, what worries me, not as the Speaker of the Parliament but as a citizen of the world, is that all of us together have much more pressing issues globally, such as climate change, that we need to and can resolve only by working together. Now, the fact that we cannot even resolve issues that actually depend on us, and that we have an increasingly more complex world with increasingly more wars in it, is a really worrying thing. Putting all of our knowledge together, all of our technology together and working together, we might not be able to solve the climate change issue, but to think that even on that thing we are not working together is something that is truly frightening.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. Before giving Mr. Darsalia the floor, I would like to remind you that this afternoon, the second session of this afternoon, starting at 2.30pm, I will have a conversation with Mr. Kevin McCarthy. Kevin McCarthy was the 55th Speaker of the US House of Representatives, and he knows Donald Trump very well. He had some quarrels with him, but now they are reconciled, at least for the time being, and I think he will give us some insights into what the next few months and years might be like, to continue this sort of discussion. Now, Mr. Darsalia.

Lasha Darsalia, First Deputy Minister for Foreign Affairs of Georgia

Thank you. It is really a difficult and important question, but I believe that the international community is much stronger than any single country. Peace is very important, but I think it is more important to have a just peace, because otherwise trying to have peace at the expense of international law will trigger future wars and future conflicts. I think this is an important concept. In this regard, even if it looks difficult, even impossible or idealistic, or whatever the sides are, the solutions have to be based on international law and a just solution of the issue. If the international community takes into its arsenal international law, not any other concepts like the pragmatic approach or something, then I think it will be possible not only to achieve peace today but also to prevent conflicts in the future because there will be a high cost for any country to breach international law. I think this is important, and this is unfortunately what is difficult to do today when we are talking about Russia.

History does not like ‘if’ questions, but just imagine if Russia was stopped, not in 2022, or it is not even stopped now, but if it was stopped in 1991, when it triggered the ethnic cleansing of Georgians in the Georgian state, or if it was stopped during the genocide in Chechnya, or for its actions in Transnistria, or in 2008. Because we Georgians remember. We hear this all the time: “Okay, yes, you have these problems. You are being occupied. However, let us



pragmatically engage with Russia and hear what they want.” They want just one thing. They do not recognize their neighbors as countries. For as long as we will not take international law as our key orientation, we will keep asking who is next. For as long as we will not deal with the issue of who was before, we will keep asking who is next. This looks difficult, even idealistic, but that is unfortunately the only solution.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much.

Ana Brnabić

If I might just interfere quickly. At the same time, let us not look at this too simplistically because Russia, I would say, is a global superpower. As the global superpowers stand together, it is not the only global superpower that sometimes has complete disregard for the UN Charter and the international rule of law. Other superpowers do the same. Therefore, it is not the problem of Russia. It is the problem, I think, of the global superpowers. As you have said, there is no single country that is more powerful than the international rule of law, but they behave as if they are. I know, again, based on my country, Serbia, we were bombed in 1999 by the NATO alliance without a decision made by the UN Security Council because NATO knew that it would not pass by the UN Security Council. However, that is precisely what the UN Security Council is for. Then, they have taken away a part of our territory, our autonomous province, Kosovo and Metohija. It was not done by Russia. It was done by other global superpowers. Therefore, Russia has done something that they have seen others do before them.

Lasha Darsalia

Yes, and I totally agree. This is why I did not say that international law only has to refer to Russia, but the international community, generally. That is why Georgia does not recognize Kosovo as an independent country, because it recognizes the principle of territorial integrity.

Ana Brnabić

Thank you for that.

Lasha Darsalia

However, that is exactly my point. There is never any justification for a breach of international law.

Ana Brnabić

Yes, it is true.

Lasha Darsalia

Just because things happened in the past does not justify what is happening now. Basically, my answer was referring to that because it was a discussion about Ukraine. Russia not only

violates the sovereignty of Ukraine, but it also challenges the international system, and it challenges and tries to revise international system to make it based on the primacy of power, rather than on international law. I really do not want to go into discussing previous cases, because there could be a lot of things before, but we now have what I think is something unique, which is that Russia is trying to replace international law with primacy of power. This is really unique in this situation.

Thierry de Montbrial

Thank you very much. Before giving the floor to Roman again, this reminds me of a discussion I had in Moscow in the 1990s, when Russia was very weak. It was a discussion with Mr. Ivanov, who was then Foreign Minister of Russia. I asked him, "Well, what can you do? What should your basic principles be to conduct diplomacy in such a situation?" He told me, "Oh, it is very simple. When a country is weak, it has to stick to international law. When it is strong, it is significantly different." I think this theorem is verified almost every day. The relationship between the strength or weakness of a country and international law is an interesting research subject in itself. Roman?

Roman Vassilenko, Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Kazakhstan

Thank you so much. It is fascinating to listen to the discussion and to your comments. I think all of the speakers, including myself, will agree that what is needed is UN reform. I have been in diplomacy for 30 years plus. As long as I remember, there has been this conversation about the need for UN reform, but we are still there. More and more, we see that the UN Security Council is deadlocked, gridlocked, because of the veto power of one of the five countries. We think that we need to get serious about this reform, and it has to have a stronger regional representation. There are countries that have much more economic clout than they used to have in 1945 when this arrangement was established. I think it is increasingly obvious that the UN and the UN Security Council are becoming increasingly irrelevant, shall we say. That is wrong. The UN is the only international unique organization. As multilateralists, we are strongly in favor of the United Nations and strengthening its mandate, and that can only be done if we are to build a fairer system within the UN. I know there have been various groups, various discussions, but they have come to naught so far, and that is very, very bad for mankind, especially since we are facing so many challenges globally, not just wars, but climate change and the advent of new technologies that we all need to take care of together.

You mentioned the middle powers. We were called a middle power earlier this year by a German think tank. We appreciate this title, but we take it very seriously and we understand that this requires a lot of responsibility. We are ready to share our experience. We are ready to contribute to the resolution of international conflicts, but we think that we can only do it together, again, perhaps as a network of likeminded middle powers who can come together and impress upon the superpowers that there is a greater international community which stands for international law. If we are to follow the logic of Mr. Ivanov to follow the rule of the strong one, this is the law of the jungle. What will come of the world after that? Nothing good.