

# Mogens Lykketoft: “A Trump victory would be a nightmare for everything we have worked towards in the UN”

 [blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/11/08/trump-un-clinton-mogens-lykketoft/](https://blogs.lse.ac.uk/europpblog/2016/11/08/trump-un-clinton-mogens-lykketoft/)

08/11/2016

*With America due to elect its next President, what will the outcome mean for Europe and the rest of the world? In an interview with EUROPP's editors Stuart Brown and Tena Prelec, **Mogens Lykketoft**, the former President of the UN General Assembly, discusses what a Trump victory would mean for the international community, whether Hillary Clinton would adopt the same approach as Barack Obama in dealing with the world, and why the selection of António Guterres as the next UN Secretary General was the right decision.*



**Americans are set to go to the polls today to select their next President. If Donald Trump succeeds in his campaign, what would it mean for both Europe and the wider world?**

I think a Trump victory would be a nightmare for everything I've been working towards through the UN. If you look at the global agreements on sustainable development and climate change that we passed at the UN during my presidency last year, it was only possible to reach a global consensus because the world's two major economies – the United States and China – were working together for ambitious changes to the way we produce and the way we consume.

They were both willing to try and make those regulations and taxation systems that we need to have in the future to balance the long-term needs of humanity with the short-term profit goals of private actors. The United States is crucial here and if we have a climate denier as President then it will not be possible to reach the goals we have set up in the international community. That's one of the reasons why it would be detrimental if Trump were to win in my view.

The second reason is that this man, if we take his statements at face value, has an ambition to start a trade war with China. I don't think that any kind of stability in the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be possible without balanced cooperation, albeit with some conflicts of interest, between the two major global economic powers. Obama has tried to do this and the Chinese leadership ultimately has the same interests at heart because they want stability to improve the living conditions of their people and stabilise their regime. So there is a degree of rationality in both the United States and China at present, and if the United States were to lose this level of rationality then it would be extremely dangerous.

It would also be difficult to deal with the role of Putin's Russia in spoiling solutions in Ukraine and Syria without having a consensus between the countries of the West. If there is any sliding back on the unity that exists in negotiations with Russia, then we will not be able to solve these conflicts. These are the major reasons why I find the prospect of Trump winning very scary indeed.

**The received wisdom is that if Hillary Clinton were to win the Presidency then there would be less upheaval in the United States' approach to the world. Is this an accurate perspective to take in your view?**

I don't believe there will be a great deal of change if Hillary Clinton is elected President. She may have articulated a more confrontational style of rhetoric towards Russia, but I don't think that the broader international goals supported by Clinton would be that different to what Obama has done in office. Certainly, she would do whatever she could to keep America's European allies together in terms of how they deal with Russia, but no, I don't see a great change occurring if Hillary were to be successful.

**The UN has just elected a new Secretary General, António Guterres, who will take over from Ban Ki-moon at**

**the end of this year. Given your experience at the UN, what are your views on Guterres and the process that led to his appointment? In particular, there had been some discussions previously that the new Secretary General should for reasons of balance be a female candidate from Eastern Europe, which obviously did not end up being the case with Guterres.**

I think the choice of Guterres was determined far more by the new selection procedure than by anything else. For the first time, we didn't just talk about using a new procedure, we actually established one in practice which will be there for the long-term. All those countries who are not represented on the Security Council, and certainly are not permanent members, wanted some real influence over the decision-making process. I think they got that because through the hearings that were held, as well as the town hall meeting in July where ten candidates, including Guterres, took part, we received a much better impression of the candidates, their policies, and their personal capabilities than ever before. In the end, it was very difficult for the Security Council to reject the candidate that without any doubt had performed the best in both the individual meetings and the town hall meeting.

Of course, we can say that there was an expectation that the next Secretary General should come from Eastern Europe. However, if there was a unified ambition from Eastern Europe for this to occur then there wouldn't have been eight different candidates from the region. Similarly, if there was a uniform ambition that at all costs we should have had a female Secretary General, then there shouldn't have been seven female candidates in the running. But the most important point for me is that I have no doubt whatsoever that António Guterres was the candidate that performed best during the process, and it was by no means a coincidence that we elected an individual who had been Prime Minister of his country, but also that at a time when 65 million people are displaced around the world, we elected a Secretary General who had ten years of experience as United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees.

All of these good arguments for Guterres were there and I'm sure that we have ended up with a strong moral authority, a skilled diplomat and politician, and above all a man with the necessary ambition to change many of the silos and bureaucracies that exist in the UN. This is a difficult job to accomplish, but if anyone can do it then Guterres can.

**One of the topics you have spoken about recently is the issue of whether countries are turning against democracy and the role that new technology may have in this trend. What are some of the challenges posed by new technologies?**

I think there are indeed some worrying developments going on in this area at the moment. Through social media and the internet more generally, people are increasingly isolating themselves and communicating more frequently with only the people they agree with. This is helping to create a post-factual world where people simply listen to the version of the world they believe in and not to the other versions that are out there. This is maybe one of the explanations for the rise of a very nationalistic, xenophobic, populist and in some places even fascist discourse across the world.

But on the other hand I would say that there are many positive possibilities to be harnessed from the better communication made possible by new technologies. So this does not need to be a negative development, but right now we are in a difficult situation and we need to come with a solution.

**Finally, your country, Denmark, often sits at the top of rankings for tackling corruption, freedom of the press, and overall happiness. Are there lessons that other countries can take from Denmark?**

Denmark has its dark sides, too. And yet, over the past few decades, Denmark has been consistently rated as one of the world's happiest countries and one of the least corrupt countries in the world (if not the least corrupt overall). Naturally, these two things are interconnected, in a way. On the one hand you have the welfare system and the relatively high degree of social harmony and equal distribution of possibilities in Denmark. On the other, there is the knowledge of citizens that when they pay their taxes this money will be invested in social welfare, education, and health, and will not end up lining the pockets of some corrupt politician or bureaucrat.

This, I believe, is a very big part of the explanation of why the Danish people report a much higher degree of happiness than in so many other countries. It is not that politicians can make people happy, but that they can help people avoid a number of potential sources of unhappiness.

*This interview took place with the support of the [2016 Web Summit in Lisbon](#)*

*[Please read our comments policy before commenting.](#)*

*Note: This article gives the views of the interviewee, and not the position of EUROPP – European Politics and Policy, nor of the London School of Economics. Featured image credit: [UN \(CC-BY-SA-2.0\)](#)*

*Shortened URL for this post: <http://bit.ly/2fVlrTi>*

---

## **About the interviewee**

### **Mogens Lykketoft**

Mogens Lykketoft is a Danish politician who was the President of the UN General Assembly between September 2015 and September 2016. He was previously the Danish Finance Minister and Foreign Minister, and was the leader of the Danish Social Democrats between 2002 and 2005.



-