

UNDERSTANDING THE WORLD WITH PASCAL BONIFACE AND MR GEOPOLITIX

Thursday 26 september, 2:00 p.m. – 3:30 p.m., Or room



Gildas Leprince and Pascal Boniface

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Pascal Boniface, Director of the Institute of International and Strategic Relations (IRIS) became interested in geopolitics somewhat by chance. This was not his first vocation, as he had first studied law before turning to political science. 'Today, I am known for my teaching skills. When I write books, I try to alternate between pure pedagogy with atlases, without intellectual pretension but aiming just to explain the world, and essays in which I can take a position. It's very important to distinguish between the two,' he began as a preamble to this debate, where the students were immediately invited to question the two speakers on how they could decipher the world while retaining their free will.

This new generation has embraced social networks, which have become their first source for information via TikTok, Instagram and Youtube. But are these new tools subject to the same rules as the traditional press, television and radio? 'Yes,' explained Pascal Boniface.

SPEAKERS

Pascal Boniface, Director of IRIS

Gildas Leprince, Youtuber, aka Mister Geopolitix

'We have complete freedom of expression and opinion, except when it involves racist remarks, insults or defamation, which don't constitute an opinion, but a punishable offence.' Gildas Leprince, a YouTuber better known as Mister Geopolitix, admits to having already made mistakes in his popular geopolitical videos. 'But it doesn't matter, we can make a mistake and rectify the situation by adding a comment to explain it. It is also up to you to accept that there may be errors and to learn to inform yourself well by finding more sources.' But as opinion channels keep looping and multiplying, is it still possible to be totally neutral on subjects as divisive as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict? For the Youtuber, who is used to going into the field all over the world to collect testimonies and pro-



duce reports, 'neutrality does not exist. What matters is the search for impartiality.' Pascal Boniface added: 'We all have experiences that prevent us from being truly neutral. On the other hand, impartiality is important, and integrity above all. There are activists who ignore the arguments of others. Journalists are required to abide by the Munich Code of Ethics, signed in 1971, which states that it is forbidden to state something if they have proof that it is false. It's a question of ethics.' Returning to the place that social networks have taken in the dissemination of information, Pascal Boniface stated that he does not contrast them with the mainstream media, with massive disinformation on the one hand, and information that is surely true and sourced on the other. 'There is as much falsehood as truth in both. Everyone is a receiver and a transmitter of information.'

But then, how do you know if a source is real, or not? Gildas Leprince believes that citing just one source is not enough. It's always necessary to cross-check several, whereas a single point of view can be biased, oriented, partisan or fallacious. The danger of social networks lies in the fact that they lock us in a bubble, a 'confirmation bias' as Pascal Boniface explained,



Watch
the full
debate on
YouTube

whose algorithms lead us towards content we agree with. 'You always have to try to think against yourself,' he added. In this respect, news channels also suffer from the same biases. An example was cited: at Sciences Po Paris, just before the 2016 American elections, a poll was carried out and the students voted overwhelmingly in favour of Hillary Clinton. 'Yet it was Trump who was elected. They didn't understand because, listening to the experts on the television channels who were predicting a victory for Hillary Clinton, they thought that the voters would go in that direction. Trying to understand others doesn't necessarily mean agreeing with them, but it means being intellectually mobile.'

Everyone is a receiver and a transmitter of information

Pascal Boniface

Gildas Leprince noted, however, that for some time now, he has seen the emergence of opinion biases with a partisan point of view on social networks, which he believes is more present than a few years ago. 'I'm trying to do more journalistic work, because my goal is not to convince but to give a better understanding of the world.' But this multiplication of information channels and relays on social networks also has its good side. Pascal Boniface remembers a time when, in France, there was only one television channel, ORTF, controlled by the State. 'Today, you will find a Western discourse on opinion channels that is pretty much the same everywhere, but you always have the possibility of going to see what is said on very high-quality, alternative media like Arrêt sur Images, Blast or Le Media, and it's often very funny,' he concluded.