

About the Trilateral Commission

trilateral.org/page/3/about-trilateral



THE TRILATERAL COMMISSION

The Trilateral Commission is a non-governmental, policy-oriented forum that brings together leaders in their individual capacity from the worlds of business, government, academia, press and media, as well as civil society. The Commission offers a global platform for open dialogue, reaching out to those with different views and engaging with decision makers from around the world with the aim of finding solutions to the great geopolitical, economic and social challenges of our time. Its members share a firm belief in the values of rule of law, democratic government, human rights, freedom of speech and free enterprise that underpin human progress. Members are also committed to supporting a rules-based international system, closer cooperation across borders and respect for the diversity of approaches to policy issues.

The Trilateral Commission was formed in 1973 by private citizens of Japan, Europe (European Union countries), and North America (United States and Canada) to foster closer cooperation among these core industrialized areas of the world with shared leadership responsibilities in the wider international system. Originally established for three years, our work has been renewed for successive triennia (three-year periods), most recently for a triennium to be completed in 2015.

When the first triennium of the Trilateral Commission was launched in 1973, the most immediate purpose was to draw together—at a time of considerable friction among governments—the highest-level unofficial group possible to look together at the key common problems facing our three areas. At a deeper level, there was a sense that the United States was no longer in such a singular leadership position as it had been in earlier post-World War II years, and that a more shared form of leadership—including Europe and Japan in particular—would be needed for the international system to navigate successfully the major challenges of the coming years.

The “growing interdependence” that so impressed the founders of the Trilateral Commission in the early 1970s has deepened into “globalization.” That interdependence also has ensured that the unduring effects of the financial crisis that began in 2008 has been felt in every nation and region. It has fundamentally shaken confidence in the international system as a whole. The Commission sees in these unprecedented events a stronger need for shared thinking and leadership by the Trilateral countries, who (along with the principal international organizations) have been the primary anchors of the wider international system. Doubts about whether and how this primacy will change do not diminish, and, if anything, have intensified the need to take into account the dramatic

transformation of the international system. As relations with other countries become more mature—and power more diffuse—the leadership tasks of the original Trilateral countries need to be carried out with others to an increasing extent.

As our conviction has strengthened that the Commission remains more important than ever in helping our countries fulfill their shared leadership responsibilities in the wider international system, we too have changed. Our membership has widened to reflect broader changes in the world. Thus, the Japan Group has become a Pacific Asian Group, including in 2009 both Chinese and Indian members. Mexican members have been added to the North American Group. The European Group continues to widen in line with the enlargement of the EU. We are also continuing in this triennium our practice of inviting a number of participants from other key areas.