

The 149<sup>th</sup> Bergedorf Round Table

## **Europe and Asia: Partners in a New Global Order?**

10 September 2011, Schloss Bellevue, Berlin

### **SUMMARY OF THE DISCUSSION**

**The 149<sup>th</sup> Bergedorf Round Table was held on the occasion of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Bergedorf Round Table. This executive summary contains the salient points of the discussion.**

#### **I. Towards a New Global Order?**

There was general appreciation among the participants that the current global order was fraught with anxiety and uncertainty. Unlike the past decades of steady economic growth and low inflation, the world order today was no longer seen as a ‘win-win’ game for economies in the West and in the East. What we witnessed now was a two-speed world with low growth levels in the West, where there was a looming threat of recession, and high growth levels in the emerging markets of the East. The dual track developments, as Asian participants pointed out, could lead to increasingly reactive policy responses, where painful measures were postponed to the future, and the global economy muddling through these uncertain times. It also stood to reason that the two-track growth could not be sustained in economic and political terms. The East had not been decoupled from the West, and this underlined the interdependency between Europe and Asia.

With the international order increasingly being influenced by ideas, aspirations and interests of Asian countries, Western participants called for a more unified European policy towards Asia. It was crucial for Europe to speak with one voice when developing partnerships with emerging powers, and to help its Asian partners to develop ideas and interests that were aligned with those of Europe. Europe should not regard Asia’s rise as a threat but as a challenge for Europe to act and to capitalise on its strengths of being more open, networked and flexible in international politics. In the face of a more chaotic distribution of power in the international system, it was all the more important for Europe to continue to be a power centre capable of stabilising the global order. The current euro-zone sovereign debt crisis was only temporary, and Europe should not lose sight of its goals and continue to strive for deeper integration. In tackling the current debt crisis, Europe could also learn from the reforms and capacity for renewal of those Asian countries which went through the Asian financial crisis in the 1990s.

Some Western participants went on to suggest that, unlike the Cold War, in which despite the lack of trust, there were rules and instruments for engagement, it seemed that today’s world order no longer possessed the wherewithal and the policy instruments that were needed to manage emerging conflicts. Other Western participants questioned whether an increasingly multi-polar

world would be a safe world. There was a growing recognition of the need to establish a 'global interest alliance' just as the international community rallied together to respond to 9/11 terrorism in 2001 in order to address common challenges including financial instability and climate change. G20 and G8 remained important informal mechanisms, but they should not be seen as alternatives to the United Nations which should be strengthened as the only institution that had enjoyed global legitimacy.

Given that the 'highest good in partnership is trust', some Western participants expressed scepticism about the prospect of a greater East-West partnership without enhancing the level of mutual trust. This lack of mutual trust was visible at various levels. There was no trust when it came to the ways in which Asia and Europe perceived the current global instability. The Europeans had overstated their risks of instability. Some Western participants opined that Europe was in good shape. Rather, they pointed out that the Asians had underestimated their own risks. Moreover, there was a lack of mutual trust with regard to the value systems of East and West, and to how the two sides perceived economic growth. In response, it was suggested that both Asia and Europe should try to tackle concrete security threats, for example in Somalia, a failed state, in order to mitigate maritime piracy in the Indian Ocean. Such cooperation could serve as a starting point for greater strategic trust between Asia and Europe.

## II. The Rise of the New East

In discussing the rise of the New East, there was general recognition that the profound economic changes in Asia were reshaping the international order which presented both opportunities and challenges to the global community. However, Asian participants reminded the Round Table that Asia's rise was contingent in a rapidly changing global environment, and it would be rather misguided to suggest that Asia had already become second to none.

Another observation raised by participants was that while Asia had become more integrated in economic terms, it had also become more divided politically on account of the various political systems in the region. Notwithstanding this, there was a general consensus that Asia should take on greater responsibilities in international affairs. As it was, Asia's political role in global affairs was not commensurate with its growing economic strength.

However, there was scepticism among participants about whether or not the rise of Asia, and in particular that of China, would result in a struggle for global hegemony. The recent territorial disputes in the South China Sea seemed to demonstrate China's hegemonic ambitions. In response, Chinese participants reminded all that China did not have the political ambition or the ability to rise to global leadership, or to establish a G2 world with US as some political observers had suggested. In running a country with a population of 1.3 billion, the Chinese already had a heavy burden on its hands, and deeply understood the difficulties associated with the task of managing the country's affairs. For this reason, the Chinese leadership had neither the intention nor the ability now or in the future to strive for global leadership. Rather, China was intent on improving the lives of its people, for although China was the second largest economy, its per capita income remained low, and it was faced with a growing urban-rural divide.

The discussion of the rise of Asia had also prompted some participants to comment on the fact that the East and the West interpreted the notion of a responsible stakeholder in different ways. Central to the US perspective was the idea of combating rogue states. Europe regarded international obligations as setting the rules and norms to be institutionalised and complied by all players. On the other hand, Asia perceived global responsibility as putting its own house in order, and this was its way of contributing to the stability of the global order.

### **III. Asia—Europe Cooperation in Regional Security**

There was a meeting of the minds on the need for greater cooperation and coordination to mitigate common security challenges. While American participants observed that China was unlike the former Soviet Union and therefore posed less of a threat to the US, there were nonetheless potential flashpoints in the Asia-Pacific area that warranted international attention. Cases in point were relations between China, India and Pakistan and the Kashmir dispute, and relations between China, Japan and Korea over the challenges of nuclear proliferation by North Korea. On the former, US had a limited role to play, while the latter, China appeared to have the most leverage over North Korean developments.

In the absence of a regional security architecture in Asia, some Western participants believed that Europe should play a greater role in the region. It was therefore regrettable, as some Western participants noted, that the EU did not commit greater attention to its relations with Asia. This was best illustrated by the lack of high-level EU representation in ASEM. Other participants opined that European engagement with Asia, and in particular with ASEAN, was complicated by the Myanmar issue. However, there appeared to be some understanding among Western participants that Myanmar should not become a political stumbling block for greater cooperation with ASEAN. There were suggestions that Europe should leave ASEAN to deal with the Myanmar issue.

### **IV. North Korea, Iran and the Nuclear Dimension**

Opinions were divided on whether or not sanctions were an effective way to force states, such as North Korea or Iran, to renounce their nuclear ambitions. Some participants argued that sanctions could cause countries to rally behind their leaders, while others pointed out that all nations including Iran were entitled to pursue nuclear programme. Also, despite the sanctions that were in place, countries such as Turkey continued to intensify their relations with Iran, and China and Russia were opposed to the oil embargo.

For this reason, some participants called for greater dialogue, and pursued less of a policy of sanctions and confrontations. However, others warned that lifting sanctions would be an admission on the part of the international community that it had failed to engage Iran and North Korea. A calibrated carrot-and-stick approach which balanced punitive measures and incentives could be adopted. Another idea was to continue with the same level of sanctions and to make it clear to Iran that any nuclear threat to its neighbourhood would be seen as a direct nuclear threat to US national security.

Also, it was pointed out that there was a need for greater strategic patience in dealing with Iran and North Korea. By assuring countries which had some leverage over these states, e.g. China that a reunited Korea would not fall into the US sphere of influence might be one way of persuading China to exert greater pressure on North Korea. However, some participants were sceptical about this idea and said that some countries would actually prefer not to have a reunited Korea, for this could have wide geopolitical implications for the region. On Iran, some participants observed that Iran was looking for any opportunity to expand its political space as it sought to do through the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Others noted there was a need to continue reaching out to Iran, since it played a decisive role for regional stability in the Gulf region. There was a general consensus among participants that multilateral platforms, namely, EU3+3 and Six-Party talks remained the best way of engaging both Iran and North Korea respectively.

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**Imprint**

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