

PANEL DISCUSSION AND BOOK LAUNCH

THE EU THROUGH THE EYES OF ASIA

The Case of China and Hong Kong

Wednesday, 22 October 2008 | 16h00-18h00
Beijing News Plaza Hotel

ABSTRACT

Relations between Asia and Europe have expanded rapidly over recent decades. Since its enlargement in 2004, the EU has become the largest economy in the world. Similarly, the Asian economy is booming, including in East Asian countries that were affected by the Asian Financial Crisis of 1997/1998. The globalisation of the world economy means that the level of interdependence between the two regions is now at unprecedented levels.

In the 2001 European Commission (EC) communication “Europe and Asia: A Strategic Partnership for Enhanced Partnerships”, it is clear that strengthening relations with Asia is one of the EU’s external policy priorities, with a key aspect being “to strengthen further the mutual awareness between Europe and Asia and to reduce persisting stereotypes.”

In this context, cultivating a relationship with China, in particular, seems to have taken precedence over the EU’s dialogue with the rest of Asia. Indeed Asia and Europe and most of the world, owe their sustained growth to the sheer size and appetite of the Chinese market. China is the world’s largest producer and consumer of steel, the second biggest user of energy and the world’s second-largest economy. As far as the EU-China relationship is concerned, China is the EU’s second-largest trading partner, just behind the United States; and the EU is China’s largest trading partner.

Generally speaking, discourse regarding the EU’s strategy toward Asia has concentrated mainly on the promotion of trade, good governance, civil society development, bi-regional dialogue, as well as programmes on economic, commercial and development co-operation. In recent years, political and security co-operation have also been added to this list, presenting new opportunities for diplomatic maneuver. While trade and economic co-operation remain a fundamental part of EU-China relations, their “comprehensive strategic partnership” – as it has become known – envisions to cover a wider spectrum of this complex relationship. Certainly, what is needed to bring China and the EU and in fact Asia and Europe closer together, is more than just analyses of trade figures, tourist numbers, policy issues, common stances or identified areas of discord. However, there are two main obstacles.

On the one hand, there is the issue of Europe's identity and role. In a recent poll carried out by the European Commission regarding the Irish rejection of the Lisbon Treaty, lack of information was cited as one of the main reasons for the "no" vote. This absence of an EU consensus on the final goal of European integration between policy-makers and ordinary citizens has created a confused and perplexing image for those outside the borders of the EU27. This in turn has obscured the EU's relationship with its Asian counterparts, including China.

On the other hand, until recently, there has been little scientific information about how the EU and Asia-Europe relations are perceived in China, an emerging global power. Further, given the conventional emphasis on the activities and importance of political elites, public perception of ordinary Chinese citizens has received even less attention, although they constitute almost one-fifth of the world population.

Held on the occasion of the Asia-Europe Meeting Summit (ASEM) 7 Summit, this panel seeks to fill this gap by examining what Europe and the EU means to the citizens in China and Hong Kong, comparing the perceptions of the EU among the media, general public and elites. Key questions to be addressed will be as follows:

- Is the EU a recognisable actor in the eyes of the citizens of China and Hong Kong?
- What are the most mentioned images of the EU in China and Hong Kong?
- How would people in China and Hong Kong evaluate the current and future state of the relationship with the EU?
- How important is the EU to China and Hong Kong when compared to the United States and other neighbouring nations?
- Has the enlargement process and other internal developments of the EU influenced how it is perceived by its Asian counterparts?
- What are the major news sources and information about the EU in China and Hong Kong?
- Looking ahead, as the EU's relevance to China and Hong Kong is expected to grow, what are the opportunities and obstacles concerning the roles and expectations of the EU?
- Is it likely that public perceptions in China regarding the West, and in particular the EU, will change in the light of recent contentious discussions regarding China's role in various global issues?

The basis of this discussion will be a findings of the first two phases of the "EU through the Eyes of Asia", a study initiated by the Asia-Europe Foundation and the National Centre for Research on Europe that begins to measure media, public and elite perceptions of the EU in China, Japan, Korea, Singapore and Thailand. The panel discussants will draw upon the scientific and rigorous information provided by this study regarding the attitudes and perceptions of citizens of two of the EU's long-term partners in East Asia.

Considering that EU political leaders pay attention to various levels of public perceptions in the process of formulating policy, this panel invites participants to ponder upon the strengths and weaknesses of European foreign policy, trade and development policy towards China and Hong Kong, and the emergence of China as a formidable global player.

PROGRAMME

15:30 Registration

16:00 Welcome Remarks

Mr. Peter Ryan

Director
Intellectual Exchange Department
Asia-Europe Foundation

Prof. Chen Yulu

Vice President
Renmin University of China

16:20 Panel Discussion: "The EU through the Eyes of Asia: The Case of China and Hong Kong"

Moderator:

Prof. Xinning Song

Senior Research Fellow
United Nations University
Centre for Comparative Regional Integration Studies
Jean Monnet Chair Professor
Renmin University of China
Center for European Studies

Discussants:

Prof. Martin Holland

Director
National Centre for Research on Europe
University of Canterbury

Dr. Kenneth Chan

Associate Professor
Department of Government and International Studies
Hong Kong Baptist University
China

Prof. Dai Bingran

Jean Monnet Chair
Centre for European Studies
Fudan University
China

- 17:10** **Q&A**
- 17:40** **Launch of the Book “EU through the Eyes of Asia” and Closing Remarks**
- Ambassador Won-il Cho**
Executive Director
Asia-Europe Foundation
- 17:50** **Reception**

ABOUT US

ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION

The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** advances mutual understanding and collaboration between the people of Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges. These exchanges include conferences, lecture tours, workshops, seminars and the use of web-based platforms. The major achievement of ASEF is the establishment of permanent bi-regional networks focused on areas and issues that help to strengthen Asia-Europe relations. Established in February 1997 by the partners of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)¹, ASEF reports to a board of governors representing the ASEM partners. ASEF is the only permanent physical institution of the ASEM process. Since 1997, the Foundation has initiated projects engaging 14,000 individuals from Asia and Europe. ASEF works in partnership with other public institutions and civil society actors to ensure its work is broad-based and balanced among the partner countries.

The European Studies in Asia (ESiA) network was initiated by ASEF to stimulate European studies in the Asian region by providing a reliable platform for exchange and co-operation between European studies academics both in Asia and Europe. As an all-inclusive network, ESiA embraces all academics, institutions and networks specialising in European studies in Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) countries. It endeavours to strengthen existing academic links in Asia as well as facilitate the creation of new synergies within Asia as well as between Asia and Europe, through networking meetings, academic collaborations and the use of online tools. The "EU through the Eyes of Asia" is the inaugural project of the ESiA network. For more information, please visit <http://esia.asef.org>

CENTRE FOR EUROPEAN STUDIES – RENMIN UNIVERSITY OF CHINA

The European Economic Community Information and Research Center ---- the forebody of Center for European Studies was organized in 1994, which was promoted to university level research center and renamed as Center for European Studies in 1996. Selected as one of the key institutions of EU-China Higher Education Cooperation Program in 1997, the CESRUS became the key supporting target of Asian Link project and EU-China European Studies Center Program for the following consecutive years. In 2000, CESRUC was awarded as the National Key Research Institute by the China Ministry of Education and in 2005 was awarded as the Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence by the European Commission, which was the only one in China. The director of CESRUC was Dr. Song Xinning, Jean Monnet Chair Professor. After he became the senior researcher of the UNU-CRIS, Dr. Zhang Xiaojin took his place in the centre.

The Center is very active in the fields of European studies, namely the politics, economics, law and social issues, and occasionally published *European Studies Forum* and *European Studies* and two book series on European studies and comparative regional integration since 1998.

¹ **ASEM** (the Asia-Europe Meeting) is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation. It brings together Austria, Belgium, Brunei, Bulgaria, Cambodia, China, Cyprus, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, India, Indonesia, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Laos, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malaysia, Malta, Mongolia, Myanmar, the Netherlands, Pakistan, the Philippines, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Singapore, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Thailand, United Kingdom, Vietnam, the ASEAN Secretariat and the European Commission. <http://www.aseminfoboard.org>