

Conference – 24th of March 2015
Calculated tensions in Asia-Pacific
Summary

Brussels, 27th of March

On March 24, the European Institute for International Relations (IERI) organised the sixth Conference of this academic year. The title of this session was « **Calculated tensions in Asia-Pacific** » and the main topic focused on the triangle China-Japan-Korean peninsula.

Major Serge Stroobants, professor of Global Politics at the École Royale Militaire, was **the chairman** for the first time at IERI. He opened the conference by pointing out the importance of the challenge between the pillars of power in South-East Asia, in particular by making a striking declaration : « On est en guerre avec la Chine » (« we are at war against China »). By using this expression, Major Stroobants meant that when two states or organisations are comparing one to each other, they are actually competing on the basis of their pillars of power and they are also mutually affecting themselves.

In order to illustrate his assertion, he presented the role of China which faced a huge development in all sectors, particularly in the economical field; for this reason, he stated that China is at war against the European Union on the economical side.

Major Stroobants briefly stated the source of struggle represented by the alarming situation in the South China Sea which generates local clashes between States directly interested in this strategical zone. Actually the Chinese approach is in opposition to the United Nations approach; Chinese Government prefers to establish bilateral agreements with all interested States while United Nations suggested a multilateral debate among States.

Before leaving the debate to the spokesmen invited, Major Stroobants mentioned a quotation made by an Ambassador of the triangle, who attended a Conference at the Circle Gaulois in Brussels, “Friendly Prosperity, but without telling us what to do” to which he referred to the typology of relation between China, Japan and the Korean Peninsula: prosperity and friendship, cooperation and collaboration but no State can take decisions for the others.

After this newsworthy introduction, Major Stroobants passed the floor to **Professor Irnerio Seminatore, President of the European Institute for International Relations**. According to Professor Seminatore, the History of this 21th century will take place in Asia. The major antagonisms move from the land, “the Heartland”, to the sea, “the Heartsea”. China is at the center of the international system, which can be seen as a multipolar structure, promoting

underlying bipolarism. China's perspective is to free the international system from the cold war organization to advocate for a spirit of negotiations. China will thus set its foreign policy as an “asymmetric diplomacy”. Professor Seminatore, then, explained the different scenarios that could emerge in Asia following the rise of China. He ended his intervention by pointing out the role of India in this situation, reminding us of India's will to win back its influence and power in the Indian Ocean.

Major Stroobants, according to Professor Seminatore's speech, pointed out the possibility of a Third World War due to the impressive increase of military force in the South-East Asia, in particular the reinforcement of nationalism both in Japan and The Korean Peninsula and the focus on internal objectives rather than search for collaboration.

The two spokesmen who had been invited as specialists on Asia-Pacific were **His Excellency Mister Viorel Isticioaia Budura, Extraordinary Ambassador and Pleni Potentiari of the European Union to Japan** and **Doctor Xavier Bara, Expert of Japanese defence and China, India, Japan and the security triangle.**

According to his diplomatic position, the Ambassador expressed his desire to avoid any theoretical considerations and to concentrate rather on practical ground and real experiences. He also affirmed his advice on benefiting from the informal discussion of the conference in order to be updated and informed on South East Asia diplomatic events.

The Ambassador Isticioaia Budura reflection was based on three main “Cs” (topics) which referred to “**Calm down, Consolidate, Construct**” or to simplify, “Cha-Cha-Cha: Chance, Change and Challenge”. These terms are referring to the three approaches we must adopt when facing North-East Asia analysis of current events, in particular when examining China, Japan and the Korean Peninsula situation.

As a diplomat, the Ambassador of the European Union to Japan, expressed his preference for making a constructive debate by avoiding any cold war language (military language) as instrument of analysis and by preferring the terminology of “**Calm down**”, reduce struggles, enhance cooperation between the European Union and North-East Asia.

It is well known that in recent years we are assisting to a rise in tensions in North-East Asia and also South East Asia and the European Union cares a lot about this region, particularly the North-East Asia area in which there are China, Japan and Republic of Korea which are three out of ten strategic partners of Europe. In order to maintain and strengthen mutual relations, it is important to calm down the high level of tension. That is not a new idea because regional leaders are already working in this perspective and the Ambassador also expressed his direct participation as a witness of Europe in conveying the right

message because it must be known that “Europe cares about East Asia, Europe cares about strategic partners in North-East Asia”.

The EU is increasingly aware of tensions in Asia and complications and consequences that should rise in the future and that is why it is sending its positive message to “**Calm down** and lay back”.

The second important “C” or topic presented by the Ambassador was the idea of “**Consolidate**”.

Since the end of the 80's, China started to promote internal reforms in order to modernise its economical structure. A lot of Countries both in Asia (Japan for example) and in Europe, adventured in the unknown chinese ground and started to invest in that area, enhancing the contribution to create the economic myth of China. Chinese people sacrificed a lot and they improved their skills in order to refine the chinese economical power and succesive leaders followed this line of policy in searching for the benefit of its people and the progress of the nation.

Europe contributed to the chinese growth and today we are assisting to the need to **Consolidate** decades of good cooperation, the need to stay together.

Ambassador Isticioaia Budura then presented the third “C” that is the concept of “**Construct**”.

After the tsunami and Fukushima nuclear accident, the level of vulnerabilty was extreamly high in Japan and neighbor countries shown their solidarity and close cooperation; that meant that constructing something together is possible. Actually, regional meetings, which provide opportunities to cooperate, calm down and to **construct** together, have already happened and it would be possible in the future to create a summit between the leaders of the North-East Asia States in order to cooperate because these countries shown shared interest like fighting against terrorism, improve energy system, working on climate change and fighting against North Korea nuclear program.

Looking into the past, The Ambassador referred to the period of the Cold War; despite the global high level of tensions it has been possible to reach agreements, for example the Helsinky Process in 1975 in which thirty-five states signed the declaration in an attempt to improve relations between the Communism bloc and the West.

Europe has a model to offer to the North-East Asia area by which a stability in that region will be achievable. Europe has to support multilateralism and the search for common platform of interests; trilateral mechanism cooperation has already started but it needs to be supported and strenghten.

Europe is trying to transmit neutral messages and provide answers: “live together, build future together, share stability, security, peace”.

Then, the chairman left the floor to **Doctor Xavier Bara, Specialist of Defence and Security policies for Eastern Asia, and Reserve Officer in the Belgian Army.**

His overview of the region is that the situation is increasingly alarming. Hence, the goal of everybody should be to stabilize the region. For him, there is no “evil power” in a geopolitical meaning but just countries defending their own interest, while from an ethical point of view there are some “evil regimes” (for example, in North Korea). Nevertheless, as His Excellency Mister Budura, Dr Bara admitted there is a large panel of positive activities in the region: economic cooperation, diplomatic forums, cultural exchanges, assistances provided in case of emergencies, ... In fact, Japan provides help when natural disasters occur in China, and China does the same for Japan.

Due to this close cooperation, Dr Bara emphasised that countries in the region try to avoid war as much as possible because there are well aware that the outcome of a war is always unpredictable.

Looking at the broader picture, Dr Bara defined the region as a “hub of major and emerging powers”. China, Japan, India, Korea, the US, Russia which is the only purely Eurasian power, Iran which is at the periphery, the ASEAN (although this sub-regional association can be divided in spheres of influence by the major powers) and at a lesser level the EU are involved, as well as some European national actors such as Britain by the FPDA (Five Power Defence Agreement with Australia, New-Zealand, Singapore, and Malaysia) or France through its DOM-TOMs in the South Pacific. On the side of the Pacific Ocean, three island chains stand out in the objectives of the Chinese strategy. The first one goes from Southern Japan, following Taiwan and continuing until the Malayan straits. The second chain is drawn from the back of Japan to Guam and the islands of the South Pacific. The last one is stretching not far from the middle of the Pacific and crossing by Hawaii. On the side of the Indian Ocean, increasing Chinese and Indian strategic stations appear on the coastlines and islands along the Southern flank of Eurasia and until the Arabic Gulf and the Red Sea conducting to the Suez Canal. It even extends towards Eastern Africa, on the rim of the ocean. The Pacific and Indian oceans are connected by the strategic passages of the Malayan straits. They constitute another hot spot for conventional state-to-state struggles, but also for insurgencies, or for piracy and other criminal activities. However, it would be wrong to pretend that the primal focus of the Asian disputes is at sea. The conflicts also spread inland. Land roads challenge the SLOC (Sea Lines of Communication). In case the sea would become difficult to access, and considering their nature of land powers, China, Russia, Korea, Iran, and Central Asia countries are developing the continental lines of communication that are essential to all of their needs and purposes. In

many regards, the Himalaya is another case of highly sensitive area in the heartland. One of these numerous vital problems concerns water. The main Asian rivers flow from the Himalayan mountains and water, the “blue gold”, represents a crucial question for the existence of the states and their people, even more than energy. The affairs related to the Himalaya are one of the main factors in the growing rivalry for survival between China and India. Moreover, considering the Asian landmass, conflicts would not be limited to the sea: land powers would directly clash, and sea powers would land their troops in order to achieve victory. It is only on the land, where people and infrastructures are located, that final and decisive victories are possible. Therefore, Dr Bara insisted on the observation of a combination of continental and maritime confrontations, as well as of an arm race fuelled by the economic rising and motivated by increasing conditions of survival. Japan is completely concerned by all of these issues and is consequently in direct rivalry and risk of conflict with China.

To sum up, Dr Bara's overview stressed the tremendous number of hot spots all over Asia which have impacts on political considerations, especially for China and India who find themselves in an intense competition because there are huge countries with great needs of resources for their massive and growing populations whereas these resources are diminishing. For Dr Bara, there is a particular “risk of non-return point”.

Nevertheless, Dr Bara highlighted that time is also a factor to take into account for the stability of the region with the evolution of technologies. If technologies evolve quickly enough, then major clashes between these powers could be avoided. Ideological reasons also play a role but it's difficult to measure to which extent powers using this nationalism are able to control it because in a crisis, the countries always need the support of their population.

Concerning the territorial questions in the Japan-China relationship, Dr Bara demonstrated that the Senkaku/Diaoyu and Okinawa are intertwined tensions. In fact, there are Chinese claims not only on the Senkaku islands but also on Okinawa which is internationally and legally recognized as a constituent of the Japanese territory. Back to a few centuries in the past, there was no claim neither on the Senkaku nor Okinawa by any of these countries and there was no treaty ruling the zone. When Japan became a unified nation in 1871, it started to look outside and the first territory Japan annexed at the time was Okinawa. Before that, Okinawa was a kingdom and a sovereign State under the double protectorate of the Qing Empire of China in one hand and of a Japanese feudal state named Satsuma on the other hand. In 1879, the Ryukyu Kingdom was integrated to Japan as the Okinawa Prefecture. The Senkaku islands were included in the package because they belonged back then to the Ryukyu Kingdom. Later, these rocks were not clearly mentioned in the Treaty of

Shimonoseki that concluded the First Sino-Japanese War (1894-1895), but their attachment to the Ryukyu was a *de facto* situation. The Senkaku were clearly integrated in the Japanese territory until the end of World War II. After the capitulation in 1945, Okinawa came under US administration. When these islands were returned to Japan in 1972, the Senkaku were supposedly part of the Ryukyu. In the late 1960s, scientific studies mentioned large oil resources in the Senkaku islands. Hence, in the 1970's, China started to be interested in acquiring these islands arguing they were in its realm before the First Sino-Japanese War and has an ancient Chinese name. In 2012, the Japanese government, in order to insure its control on the islands, bought the three main islands from a Japanese private owner. At the same time, Chinese newspapers under control of the Communist party started to state that Okinawa used to be a tributary state of China, and threaten of annexation. Consequently, according to Dr Bara, if the two issues of Okinawa and the Senkaku would be considered together as a single affair, it could bring to a *casus belli* between China and Japan.

Eventually, Dr Bara concludes by indicating that Japan is recently transforming its security policy and defence capacities. However, he affirms that this change should nevertheless be seen as a “military normalisation” rather than militarism. Japan does not plan to dominate or invade Asia. In addition, it is completely impossible and unnecessary.

Following Mr Bara's intervention, professor Seminatore made some additional remarks, notably, he wondered if the Western Model of civil societies and the role they play in these societies could be the same in Asian societies and more generally in the multipolar world we live in today. For professor Seminatore, the source of conflicts come from coalition movements. In that regards, forces in Asia are not coordinated within the ASEAN for instance and he reminded that already in the 1970s, the thinker of International relations Kaplan underlined that a bipolar system is more stable than a multipolar one. However, on the contrary of the notion of security, the concept of stability is based on mutual trust and moderation as recalled Professor Seminatore. To conclude, Professor Seminatore accented that if there is to be a third World War, Russia will be the trigger since Russia is the only Eurasian major power that can shape the “balance of power” in the region.

The next conference organised by the European Institute for International Relations will deal with the Chinese-American relationship and will take place on **April 14**. Prestigious speakers already confirmed their participation, namely His Excellency Mister QU XING, **Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to the Kingdom of Belgium**, Mark C. Storella, **Deputy Chief of the US**

Mission to Belgium and the **European Deputy** Miroslav Poche, member of the Delegation for the Relations with People's Republic of China.