



SPEECH

Visit <http://www.mindef.gov.sg> for more news and information about MINDEF and the SAF

SPEECH BY MINISTER FOR DEFENCE DR NG ENG HEN AT THE 177TH BERGEDORF ROUND TABLE ON 22 NOV 2021

1. Thank you very much for the kind invitation to join the Bergedorf Round Table. I am honoured and very happy to join you all. I recognise there are luminaries and very knowledgeable people for this Bergedorf Round Table. Really, it is an exchange of views, but I thought I would frame our discussion, because it is a large topic – how does Europe engage the Asia-Pacific?
2. I thought I will start by making a simple observation that Europe and Asia both boast old civilisations. It is not surprising then, that Asia’s history is replete with influences from Europe. If you peel through the layers of Asia’s palimpsest, you will invariably find the inter-twining of Asiatic and European cultures, through trade and other influences. And this dates back more than two millennia, some reciprocal and mutually beneficial, and others forced. From the marauding invasions by the Huns and the Mongols, the exchanges on the Silk Route and Marco Polo’s travels, colonisation by Western powers, the Meiji Restoration, the Opium Wars – every Asian country would have its own story of Europe in their inherited legacy. It is not possible to capture that history comprehensively in ten hours, let alone ten minutes.
3. But I thought we can and ought to make salient observations and learn from our past to better shape the future, to “upgrade that partnership between Europe and the Indo-Pacific”, as this session is titled.
4. And here I would pose a few questions on Europe and its ambitions and relationship with the Asia-Pacific. First question. What would be the fundamental goals on which engagement and involvement with the Asia-Pacific be predicated upon in the 21st century? If you think about the question, I think the answers are not as straightforward as they seem. But clearly, I think we can all agree on what those goals cannot be.
5. Certainly not, as in the past, for reasons of domination, forced access to natural resources or markets that Europe lack. I think that much is clear to all of us. But what about value systems, ideology and modes of governance? Should Europe impose or set standards as a *raison d’être* for partnership or action? While there may be occasions where moral and ethical standards are called for, the question – I think – is not if, but to what extent, and to what ends? In ideological terms,

MINDEF Communications Organisation

Public Communications Directorate

MINDEF Building, 303 Gombak Drive, #01-26 Singapore 669645 Tel: 9228 6190 Fax: 6769 5139

European countries have had centuries to contest ideas, evolve and transform through many of epochal events in global history. This includes the Protestant Reformation, the Age of Enlightenment, the Romantic period, and the contests of political economies between capitalism, communism and socialism; and sometimes with excruciating birthing pains including two World Wars.

6. Meanwhile, most Asian countries are new countries. For example, among ASEAN member-states, Burma, now Myanmar, became independent in 1948. For Singapore, it was 1965. Brunei, our latest member of ASEAN, only obtained independence in 1984. China is the world's oldest civilisation, but Republican-era China was only declared in 1912. It achieved its first centenary goal this year, the centennial of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party. And as we all know, President Xi Jinping has set the second goal to be achieved in the centenary of the founding of the People's Republic of China in 2049.

7. What other positive avenues exist to build that partnership, between Europe and the Indo-pacific? I think there are quite a few, but let me just focus on four. First, exchange of persons, particularly students. Few of us here would disagree on how powerful the formative experiences of our young in a foreign land can be and how it breaks down barriers. As a young man, President Xi Jinping spent time in Muscatine, Iowa as part of a five-man mission studying agricultural techniques. 27 years on, even as paramount leader, the visit to this family was on his agenda when he visited the US. Europe may also benefit in a similar fashion by expanding the reach of its educational programs in order to attract their unfair share of Asia's best and brightest. The US and UK have successfully done so in the past, partly due to the use of English as the lingua franca.

8. Second, co-creating the new rules of globalisation. The 70 years post-World War 2 brought our world to a higher level of economic and social development. I think we can all agree on that. But what has also become evident are new problems and deficiencies. Among them are first, wealth inequality; followed by unsustainable practices and its impact on climate change; as well as unfair trade practices like state subsidies, product dumping and loss of local jobs. Europe can, together with the Asia-Pacific, shape more equitable new rules for Globalisation 2.0, one that is more in tune with the zeitgeist of the 21st century and the millennials, and this includes responsible institutional and corporate citizenry.

9. Third, advancements in science and technology – working with the Asia-Pacific. While we need technology to solve many of society's ills, which any individual country cannot deal with alone, many of the new technologies for artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, space exploration and exploitation require ethical boundaries. This can be addressed by Europe, which is highly respected for its legal frameworks that balance the protection of individuals and corporate needs.

10. The fourth area I would like to talk about is international trade, Europe has had strong and deep trading instincts for centuries, and it stands to reason that in order to advance its own interests; it must continue to play that role. It must look outward and strengthen trade links with the Asia-Pacific.

11. I think Thomas Paulsen gave a good summary on what the next decade or next century will hold. There are some salient facts that bear repeating. First, approximately 60% of world trade passes through Asia, and 30% passes through the South China Sea. Second, Asia now accounts for nearly 42% of world exports and 38.2% of global imports. In 20 years' time, it is expected to account for half of global GDP and 40% of global consumption. Investment of the EU in Asia now stands at approximately USD\$90 billion per annum. Fourth, Asia now accounts for two-thirds of all patent

applications worldwide last year. I would conclude with the assertion that Europe cannot afford to be on the sidelines in this phase of Asia-Pacific's history – it must play a central role as there is too much at stake for Europe and the western world.

7. Thank you.

###

For further queries, please contact:

Mr Caleb Loei

Senior Manager (Media Relations)

Tel: +65 9645 7922

Email: Caleb_Loei@mindef.gov.sg