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Den Haag

Conversations on the future of Europe in the world

The EU's Global Gateway: from Brussels to Bishkek and beyond

The Hague and online, Thursday, 20 January 2022

Summary of Proceedings

With the support of



Conference
on the **Future**
of **Europe**



The Hague & Europe

The Hague has a long-standing history and strong connection with Europe. Over 7000 inhabitants in our International City of Peace and Justice work at more than 30 European organisations established in the city. As the International City, we believe in the strength of co-operation, both in the city as well as on the European level, to shape the future of Europe. Therefore, The Hague creates inspiring meeting places in co-operation with our local, national and international partners to involve local citizens in the work of our International City of Peace & Justice.

Only together are we able to realise a shared European future!

Questions or remarks? Contact us via 'Europa@denhaag.nl'

Summary of proceedings

LINKS Europe in collaboration with The City of The Hague, and with the support of The Hague Humanity Hub, hosted the fourth in a series of clusters of events entitled **‘Conversations on the future of Europe in the world’** on Thursday, 20 January 2022. The event was hosted online from the LINKS Europe’s office in The Hague. Around 35 participants joined online. The series **‘Conversations on the future of Europe in the world’** contributes to the debate in the framework of the EU’s **‘Conference on the future of Europe’** process.

The moderator of the event, **Amit Arkhipov-Goyal**, Program Manager at Elva Community Engagement, welcomed participants and introduced the topic: **“The EU’s Global Gateway, from Brussels to Bishkek and beyond”**.

Ambassador Terhi Hakala, the European Union Special Representative for Central Asia made opening remarks in a pre-recorded message, after which there were presentations by **Dr Wouter Jacobs**, Academic Director of the Leadership in Commodity Trade and Supply Networks programme, Erasmus University Rotterdam, and Senior Fellow, The Erasmus Centre for Urban Port and Transport Economics (Erasmus UPT); and **Dr Maaïke Okano-Heijmans**, Senior Research Fellow, The Clingendael Institute. This was followed by a lively discussion.

The ‘Conversations on the future of Europe in the world’ series is meant to attract diverse views and opinions and to stimulate discussions as part of the wider ‘Conference on the Future of Europe’ process. Opinions expressed in meetings or in reports from meetings do not necessarily reflect the views of LINKS Europe or The City of the Hague.

The EU's Global Gateway is more than a response to China's Road and Belt Initiative

1. The EU is first and foremost a trading bloc. Its strongest card in the international arena so far has been its ability to set standards and norms when it comes to trade and commerce. Its prosperity depends on connectivity, and primarily on smooth transport and communication links. Increasingly added to this is a third pillar – digital connectivity. The recently launched “Global Gateway” initiative promises to mobilise 300 billion euros to help boost smart, clean links in digital energy and transport, and strengthening health and education research across the world. 2. Equally unanimous was the view that there needs to be stronger European defence co-operation, co-ordination and commitment in the face of ever-increasing threats and of changes in the US defence posture. There were different views on how this increased co-operation was going to be triggered, how it could be implemented, what needed to be prioritised and whether this would ever to be achievable.

2. This initiative is worthy in itself and needs not be seen or promoted simply as a counter to China's “Belt and Road Initiative” (BRI). Nonetheless BRI was a wake-up call to an important agenda. It also showed the importance of the European initiative being distinct by the fact that it creates links not dependence. Neither should this be seen simply as a benign action. “Global Gateway” needs to be about promoting Europe's interests in an increasingly competitive world, that also recognises the importance of trade routes such as the Europe-Caucasus-Central Asia transport corridor, and choke points such as the Bosphorus, the Straits of Hormuz and the Suez Canal.

3. Participants noted that in some way “Global Gateway” was a rebranding of similar, even if more modest, past attempts to promote connectivity, some of which go back to the 1990s. They also noted that the sum of 300 billion euros included funds that had

already been earmarked for similar work, and funds that had yet to be raised from beyond the EU institutions. Ensuring that these funds become available in time was the first immediate challenge.

The importance of Central Asia

4. “Global Gateway” is one reason why the EU needs to continue reaching out to the countries of Central Asia who have been somewhat isolated from global processes. Central Asia is the bridge that connects the world’s two economic powerhouses: The EU and China.

5. To succeed in this part of the world, which has until recently been largely inaccessible and where the EU has little or no leverage, the EU needs an agile and flexible approach.

6. The EU’s strategy for Central Asia for the period 2021-2027 is based on three pillars: resilience, prosperity and regional co-operation. The EU sees connectivity as being hand-in-hand with stability and prosperity, and was working with Central Asian countries, as well as like-minded international partners, such as India and Japan. The upcoming EU-Central Asia connectivity conference can be an opportunity to give this vision a more concrete character.

The emerging multipolar world and the emergence of choke points

7. At a time when we are seeing the emergence of a multipolar world, where big power competition and rivalry is the new normal, the EU needs to give special attention to global choke points. If shipping through them is somehow hindered, that can very easily lead to global trade disruption. Some examples mentioned were the Suez Canal, the Bosphorus, and the Straits of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb.

Ownership of “Global Gateway”

8. “Global Gateway” is meant to be a partnership of various European stakeholders – those in TEAM Europe, which include the EU institutions, the member states and European financial institutions, as well as private business. The 300 billion euros envisaged for the “Global Gateway” is meant to be mobilised from all these sources. There were two considerations here that needed to be kept in mind: the first is that this initiative could not just be left to the private sector. States and state institutions had to be involved in what some would otherwise see as commercial activity best left to the market; second, and on the other hand, the private sector often had its ear to the ground in different parts of the world and its involvement would also reassure the European taxpayers, who were becoming increasingly wary of how their money was being used in far-away places.

Normative versus realist approach

9. Throughout the conversation a recurring theme was how to reconcile a normative approach with a realist approach when discussing and delivering the EU's connectivity agenda. It was felt there had to be more listening, more dialogue and less finger pointing when it comes to dealing with countries we needed to engage with. There were hard choices to be made: cheap versus sustainable; cheap versus secure; protect versus promote; and openness versus more closed economies. Navigating these dilemmas was going to have to be part of the future process of engaging with the world, not least because competitors were out there waiting to fill any vacuum that arose.

10. The EU still had considerable leverage, mainly through soft power. Because of its importance as a global economic giant, and its huge internal market, it was in a position to establish norms and standards in areas such as sanitation; health and safety standards, labour laws and conditions etc. These strengths needed to be honed and fine-tuned. EU norms on for example data protection were increasingly being copied and adapted to local conditions. Participants felt that norms still needed to drive the EU's agenda but increasingly this needs to be done subtly and in a sensitive manner.

The world is different, and we have to do different

11. In a changing, more competitive world, the EU needs to promote its interests whilst remaining loyal to its values. Global Gateway was going to be a big test as to whether the EU was able to balance and manage this process. At every stage of the process therefore EU citizens had to be well informed of what was going on and why.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Whilst there were many different opinions aired during the meeting, and differences on some of the approaches going forward, it was still possible to draw some conclusions and recommendations:

(a) The world is different, and we have to do different. In a changing, more competitive world, the EU needs to promote its interests whilst remaining loyal to its values. “Global Gateway” is going to be a big test as to whether the EU is able to balance and manage this process. At every stage of the process therefore EU citizens have to be well informed of what was going on and why.

(b) In delivering the “Global Gateway” initiative efficiently, the European Commission has to ensure joined-up decision making and co-ordinated and timely execution. The DGs that control the funds and are responsible for the delivery of the actual projects need to be fully involved, and in the long run, fully held to account for the success or otherwise of “Global Gateway”.

(c) The EU has been good at developing infrastructure within its borders; doing the same beyond its borders in far flung parts of the world is a different proposition. Participants voiced concerns about the timely delivery of projects and of the need to reconcile good practice and due diligence with the necessity to deliver in an efficient and timely manner.

(d) The EU has to find a better way on engaging with think-tanks, universities, business groups and civil society to make sure that the extensive knowledge existing in these quarters, and particularly area expertise, can be best galvanised in support of the “Global Gateway” initiative.

(e) Strategic investments in infrastructure could also contribute to reducing the carbon footprint;

identifying opportunities to do so is considered hugely important.

(f) Many reasons were mentioned why Central Asia needed to give due importance in the delivery of the “Global Gateway” initiative. The Central Asia countries are at an important crossroads in their own political and economic development, and this gives the EU an opportunity to engage that was hitherto absent. Participants called for more people-to-people contacts and multitiered frameworks for dialogue and exchanges.

About the Conference on the Future of Europe

The Conference on the Future of Europe is a citizen-led series of debates and discussions that will enable people from across Europe to share their ideas and help shape our common future.

The Conference is the first of its kind: as a major pan-European democratic exercise, it offers a new public forum for an open, inclusive, and transparent debate with citizens around a number of key priorities and challenges.

It is part of President von der Leyen's pledge to give Europeans a greater say on what the EU does and how it works for them. All Europeans - whoever they are and wherever they are - can take part.

The Conference aims to reflect our diversity, and to bring Europe beyond its capital cities, reaching every corner of the EU, strengthening the link between Europeans and the institutions that serve them. It does so through a multitude of Conference-events and debates organised across the EU, as well as through an interactive multilingual digital platform. Young people in particular are encouraged to take part and share their ideas. European, national, regional and local authorities, as well as civil society and other organisations can also organise events to involve as many people as possible. #TheFuturesYours

For more information: www.futureu.europa.eu

About LINKS Europe

LINKS Europe is a foundation based in The Hague promoting the peaceful resolution of conflicts and a secure and prosperous Europe, in friendship and solidarity with its neighbourhood. Our work is organised around five thematic areas:

1. **Peace through dialogue and confidence-building**

LINKS Europe is a peace-building organisation. We support the quest for peace through track 2 and track 1.5 initiatives, including through dialogue and confidence-building. Our work is currently focused primarily on areas in the EU's neighbourhood, with particular emphasis on the South Caucasus.

2. **A European Union in friendship and in solidarity with its neighbourhood**

LINKS Europe firmly believes that peace and prosperity in Europe are strongly dependant on peace and prosperity in Europe's neighbourhood. It supports an extensive EU commitment to the future of neighbouring regions, including through political and economic co-operation, support for peace initiatives, and extensive people-to-people contacts. We group the EU's neighbourhood in six clusters: North Africa and the Sahel; Turkey, the Balkans and the Levant; Russia and Eastern Europe; The South Caucasus; The Gulf and Red Sea Regions; and Central Asia. Whilst each cluster has its own specificity, there are also a number of common features resulting from geographic proximity and common historical experiences and connections.

3. **A Global Europe that provides safety, security and prosperity for its people and is a force for good**

Europe's increasing ambition to become a global geopolitical player is a result of necessity. We believe this will happen despite the reluctance of some and the shortcomings of others. It is therefore important to engage with this debate and help forge the new global Europe that can provide safety, security and prosperity for its citizens and be a force for good in the world. The process of 'The Conference on the Future of Europe' provides us with an excellent focus and platform to do this in a structured way.

4. **Connectivity as a tool for peace and prosperity**

In an increasingly interdependent world, isolation is not the solution. Developing proper connectivity that works well for all concerned is one of the biggest challenges of the time. Connectivity, in areas such as transport and communications, is also a potential tool for peace, improving trade and business, facilitating people-to-people contacts, and enabling countries and communities to develop shared interests. LINKS Europe is contributing towards the debate on how connectivity can contribute to peace and prosperity.

5. **Understanding radicalisation, and developing responses to it**

Globalisation and connectivity have their negative side too. Radicalisation has shown a capacity to spread quickly, often leading to violence. Vulnerable groups – be they whole communities and tribes in the Sahel, or disenfranchised sons of migrants in the slums of Paris – are prone to fall victim of radicalisation. No religious or ethnic group is immune. White communities impacted by economic downturns are equally likely to succumb to extreme ideas, leading some to see violence as a solution. LINKS Europe works to understand the phenomena, including the connection between radicalisation and violent conflicts, and on ways of fighting back against this dangerous trend.



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