

Ambassadors and Scholars Calls for BRICS to Play a Bigger Role in the Next Decade

Sep. 12th 2017, Brussels

An international conference - The Role of the BRICS in the World, was successfully held in Brussels just three days after the BRICS summit in Xiamen (China from 3-5 September). Supported by five embassies of the BRICS countries to the Kingdom of Belgium, the conference was co-organized by The Egmont – Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels Academy for China and European Studies, and Confucius Institute at Vrije Universiteit Brussel. Ambassadors and scholars from five emerging economies gathered at the conference to discuss and to map out BRICS's future course.

In the opening remarks given by H.E. QU Xing, the Chinese Ambassador to Belgium, he stressed that the past decade has seen the BRICS countries making headway in pursuing common development, advancing results-oriented and mutually beneficial cooperation. Since the first Summit till now, faced with global financial crisis, BRICS countries' combined GDP has grown by 179%, their share in the world economy from 12% to 23%, their trade has grown by 94% and urban population by 28%. He hoped that the summit in Xiamen could lead to more fruitful cooperation in the next golden decade.

The breakthroughs that BRICS has achieved was also acknowledged by H.E. Mr. Alexander TOKOVININ, the Russian Ambassador to Belgium. He believed that BRICS should overcome misunderstandings and work together as an innovative entity based on the principals of mutual respect. H.E. Mr. Baso SANGQU, the Ambassador of South Africa, emphasized that Africa and BRICS are bound to have more opportunities in agriculture and economic engagement in the coming decade. H.E. Ms. Gaitri Issar KUMAR, Ambassador-designate of India, said that the Xiamen summit had shown the determination and confidence of BRICS countries in pursuing common objectives. H.E. Mr. Antonio José VALLIM GUERREIRO, Ambassador of Brazil to Belgium highlighted that BRICS not only brings robustness to the world economic growth, but also contributes to the development of a multi-polar world.

Similar prospects were also shared by scholars and representatives from the European Union. Ms. Anick VAN CALSTER, Director General of Bilateral Affairs of the Federal Public Service Foreign Affairs of Belgium, was pleased to see Xiamen Summit unprecedentedly extend its agenda to higher level cooperation such as anti-terrorism. She is looking forward to stronger partnership within BRICS countries as well as its cooperation with EU. Being the Director of a prestigious think tank in

Brussels-Friends of Europe, Ms. Shada ISLAM from Friend of Europe pointed out that the past concerns and doubts on BRICS have been proven wrong. She hoped that BRICS could keep their commitment in facing global challenges such as climate change, anti-terrorism and trade protectionism as well as in pursuing sustainable development.

Scholars have discussed about the potentials and approaches for BRICS's future engagements. Prof. SONG Xinning, Jean Monnet Chair ad personam and China Director for both Brussels Academy for China and European Studies and Confucius Institute at VUB proposed three-level BRICS-EU cooperation, consisting of a non-institutional mechanism between EU and BRICS, an inter-regionalism model between Europe and Asian, Latin American and African regions, and bilateral relationship between EU and individual BRICS countries. Mr. David Evan MALCOMSON, Chief Director from Department of International Relations and Cooperation of the South Africa stated that People-to-People cooperation model was featured in Xiamen summit and should be the focus in future economic and cultural exchanges. Professor WEI Ling, Director of Chinese Foreign Policy Studies Center at China Foreign Affairs University also pointed out that BRICS are faced with various challenges in the next decade, including anti-globalization, trade protectionism, and changes in global power distribution. However, the remarkable achievements and huge potentials have shown the commitment and contribution of BRICS countries in deepening cooperation and pursuing sustainable development, and this also encouraged BRICS to expand openness and connectivity in order to play a bigger role in the next decade.

(By GU Yuwen, VUB)