

# **EU-China-US Trilateral Relationship Brings Hope and Certainty in an Uncertain World**

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A conference concerning a trilateral relationship between the three biggest players – The EU, China and the United States, was held in Egmont Palace on 28 September 2017, co-sponsored by Egmont \_ Royal Institute for International Relations, Brussels Academy for China and European Studies, Confucius Institute at Vrije Universiteit Brussel and EU-Asia Centre.

“It was the best of times, it was the worst of times.” Chinese President Xi Jinping quoted Charles Dickens in his keynote speech at the 2017 World Economic Forum in Davos, Switzerland. He used this expression to show that we live in a world of contradictions. A few years ago, it might have seemed strange to consider a trilateral relationship when the transatlantic relationship was unquestionably closer than either EU-China or US-China relations. However, the swift rise of China as a global actor, and especially the advent of Donald Trump as President of the US have brought about some fundamental changes. What is ahead for the world with a rising China, an unstable European Union, and a “Trump-Era” US? Academics and think tank leaders gathered on Thursday to discuss and debate for more answers.

Professor Yinhong SHI from Renmin University of China expressed his concerns over the Trump administration. Trump has openly avowed an ‘America First’ approach and rejected multilateral solutions to key issues such as trade and climate change. He has shown disdain for the UN and only reluctantly endorsed NATO after describing it as ‘irrelevant’. Shi stated that this uncertainty will continue to be a question mark for the world geopolitics in the next one or two years. Dr. Duncan Freeman further elaborated that shifts in all three parties led by a more skeptical US brings the world more complexity than just looking at statistics. Tensions and doubts were also raised by professor Emil Kirchner from Essex University, UK and professor Yongjun GUO from China Institutes of Contemporary International Relations on the contesting interests between EU and China on Africa, as well as the negotiation between China and US on the problematic North Korea. Same concerns were shared by Professor Mario Telo from Universite Libre de Bruxelles. Compared with the US unprecedented trade protectionism, he believed that EU is witnessing a successful resistance against the nationalist wave in name of a better institutionalized cooperation and a regulated globalization featured by Macron and Merkel leadership.

Why is the world largest economy suffering from the backlashes of globalization? Is

globalization to blame for these uncertainties? Professor Weiping HUANG from Renmin University of China reiterated the connectivity and unity that globalization has brought the world and that by going back to individual cells cannot provide sustainable development. What lies ahead is for big players to cooperate in regulating and maintaining global trade, in order to reduce trade imbalance between different regions and to answer the rising quest for fairness and transparency in economic transactions. Professor Canrong JIN from Renmin University of China also emphasized that new trends in economic globalization should not be neglected. He emphasized that the rising middle class, their quest for more fairness as well as a growing resentment of Chinese investments abroad needs to be handled with caution in the coming decade.

Confronted by global uncertainties and instability, many scholars came to reach the consensus of combining three major global actors (the EU, China and the United States) through institutionalization and confrontation. Both Professor David Fouquet from CERIS and Professor Yong DENG from The US Navy Academy emphasized the importance of establishing a dispute mechanism for countries to put aside regional disputes and conflicts. Professor Gunter Heiduk from Warsaw School of Economics, Poland explained that negotiations could be further guaranteed by avoiding top-down policy and by implementing three categories of cooperation consisting of domestic, bilateral and international.

Being the prime defenders of the Paris climate change agreements and sharing similar pursuit for openness and connectiveness, China and EU are gaining more opportunities and space to cooperate in the next decade. Professor Chun DING from Fudan University is confident that Sino-EU relationship is coming to a new threshold under the US isolation tendency. His opinions were agreed by Professor Hua XIN from Shanghai International Studies University by elaborating the common desire of both EU and China to further promote economic globalization, regional integration, and inter-regional cooperation. Ms. Isabel Hilton, Editor of ChinaDialogue.Net is convinced that global issues such as climate change and migration requires all big actors to take part. The common desire for sustainable development, the complementarity between three different economies and the continuous globalization is going to encourage three parties to work together for common interests and a stable future.