
9th Prague Security Conference- EU-China-Russia: Looking for Common Interests.

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On a rainy November Friday in Prague hundreds of academics, politicians, diplomats and military personnel from Europe, China, Russia and beyond congregated in the National Technical Library for the 9th Prague Security Conference. Co-organised by the Centre for Security Policy CESES at the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University the conferences have been running bi-annually since 2009. This year's session was dedicated to discussing the European Union, China and Russia and to looking for points of common interests between them.

The conference, held on Friday, 15th of November, was divided into four sessions, each discussing different aspects of the main topic. The conference was opened with a speech by Jan Kohout, the Czech Minister for Foreign Affairs, and the following introductory speeches by the guests of honour included one by the Dean of the Faculty of Social Sciences at Charles University, Jakub Končelík.

The aim of the first discussion, entitled 'Looking for common interests of EU, China and Russia', was to establish some shared interests between the three actors, and the panel was compromised of Paul Freiherr von Maltzahn, Secretary General of the German Council of Foreign Relations; Miloš Balabán, Head of the Centre for Security Policy; Hu Yumin, a senior research fellow at CISS; Stanislav Cherniavsky of the Moscow state institute of IR; Alexander Lukin, Vice-President of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation and Nicolai Petro, Fullbright scholar at Odessa National University. Points of common interest as well as points of conflict were raised, with trade relationships between the three actors a major point of common interest, with the possibility of an overland trade route, or new "Silk Road" between Europe, Russia and China a popular idea. The importance of multi-polarity in the new world order was also emphasized as a common point of agreement by many. It was Hu Yumin's comment however that maybe best conveyed the panel's general consensus: that the EU, China and Russia may be partners, but they are not allies.

The second session discussed 'Opportunities for closer economic cooperation of EU, China and Russia' and included briefings by Tomáš Dub, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs; Cheng Yongru, Economic Counsellor at the People's Republic of China Embassy in Prague; Sergey Afontsev, Head of the Department for Economic Theory at the Russian Academy of Science, and Josef Perlík, Chairman of the board of the Nuclear Power Alliance. Their briefings were followed by a panel discussion consisting of various business, trade and industrial representatives. The idea of overland transport across the Eurasian continent was again a popular talking point, as was the importance of facilitating easier movement of human resources, businessmen and goods between borders.

The third session was another panel discussion, this time on transport issues between the three actors (entitled 'Development of Communication between Asia and Europe'), and it focused mainly on the idea of an overland railroad from East to West, and the so-called North Sea Road, a shipping route through the Arctic circle. The panellists were Libor Stejskal from the Centre for Security Policy; Algridas Šakalys of the Vilnius Gediminas Technical University; Lev Voronkov, Head of the Nordic Department at the Centre for Nordic and Baltic Studies in the Moscow State Institute of International Relations, Liu Xioguang, an associate research fellow at CISS; and the only female panellist to appear on the day, Olga Sehnalová, MEP and member of the Committee on Transport and Tourism. They discussed the advantages and challenges involved with both options, environmental unpredictability and the need for great investment posing challenges for the development of a North Sea road, and problems with border control and bureaucratic complication as well as the expense of train travel mentioned as issues facing overland train connections.

The last session focused on security issues and was entitled 'How to face common security threats for EU, NATO, China, and Russia'. Gen. Markus Bentler, German military representative in NATO and the EU; Mu Changlin, a Senior Research Fellow at CISS and Alexander Lukin of the Diplomatic Academy offered briefings and a panel of academics and politicians held a discussion on the topic afterwards. NATO was a great point of contention between the speakers with strong feelings for and against the institution. Another hot topic was the future of Afghanistan after the 2014 withdrawal of US troops, and the effects it would have on the region.

And so closed another successful Security Conference, having brought together many interesting and contrasting perspectives on issues that are sure to be important for Europe as well as the rest of the world in coming years.



Elan Grug Muse is in her second year studying for a BA in Politics at the University of Nottingham, and is studying for a year at the Faculty of Social Sciences in Charles University, Prague. She is interested in international politics, music and literature, and was motivated to write for iForum because it offered a good opportunity to improve her journalism skills.