Succesrig Bælte & Vej-seminar i Stockholm

Successful Belt and Road Seminar in Stockholm

On Wednesday morning, May 30th, 2018, the Schiller Institute hosted a seminar together with China's Chamber of Commerce in Sweden, China Eastern Airlines, supported by: Embassy of China in Sweden, China Cultural Center and in cooperation with: China Sweden Business Council.

It was very successful with the Chinese Ambassador speaking, together with the Ambassador of Pakistan, and the Chargé d´Affaires from South Africa as well as with Stephen Brawer, Hussein Askary and other prominent speakers. Jason Ross opened and moderated the seminar which was attended by 83 participants from embassies, industry, institutions including from the Foreign Ministry. Media were represented by Chinese media and a journalist from the largest Swedish tabloid. A number Schiller Institute contacts participated. The title of the seminar was "The Significance of China's Belt and Road Initiative for World Economic Development."

After the Chinese Ambassador, Stephen Brawer made a presentation including a strong attack against geopolitics and "the modern form of the British Empire." The topic of his speech was: "The Strategic Significance of the BRI: Overcoming Geopolitics." As the seminar also had diplomats from Pakistan and South Africa it was made clear that the Belt & Road is not only about China but a global perspective.

Hussein Askary opened up the second panel with a speech about "The Potentially Transformative Impact of the Belt and Road on Sweden, Europe and Third Parties." He presented the work of the Schiller Institute to promote the New Silk Road since

the early 1990s up to now. He was followed by managers of various companies from China and Sweden. The Deputy General Manager of Bank of China Stockholm Branch presented the impact of the B&R policies on today´s economy. Two Swedish consultants presented ways and means to develop business, esp. production and infrastructure between China and Sweden. Also the head of China Eastern Airlines, who sponsored the seminar, presented his expanding airline network between Europe and China/Asia.

In the first question period Ulf Sandmark called for Sweden to join the Belt & Road bringing up the model of Swedish Chinese industrial cooperation experience from the Volvo Cars success story, calling for extending this model of Swedish-Chinese innovative industrial cooperation to the BRI projects in Africa.

The seminar was a breakthrough from two standpoints. First that the Chinese deliberately are taking the gloves off by inviting the Schiller Institute to speak clearly about the British role of geopolitics as the ideology behind the hysterical attacks against the B&R from the Swedish establishment. Secondly the seminar was a breakthrough for the Schiller Institute in Sweden reaching out to very productive networks as well as establishment institutions who were present at the seminar.

Audience members were very open about saying they learnt something new about the B&R, which so far for most people, and especially institutions, has been misunderstood as some limited trade policy with China. The global, economic, cultural and scientific perspective in the new paradigm of B&R had been lacking in their understanding so far. Bringing in Africa in the focus, as the continent with an expected more than 2 billion population 2050 and as the coming motor of world economic growth, helped very much to widen the perspective of the audience.

Stephen Brawer´s speech: “The Strategic Significance of the BRI: Overcoming Geopolitics” started off with the World Land-Bridge map followed by a picture of Helga Zepp-LaRouche at B&R Forum in Beijing May 2017. He quoted President Xi Jinping at Boao Forum, April 2018: In a world aspiring for peace and development, the cold-war and zero-sum mentality looks even more out of place. … To promote common prosperity and development in today’s world, we have no choice but to pursue greater connectivity and integrated development.” Contrasting that, Brawer presented the Halford Mackinder´s Heartland theory. Bringing geopolitics into today with the example of Zbigniew Brzezinski who used Mackinder´s map in his book from 1997. As an example for Sweden Brawer pointed to another neutral European nation, Austria, who has taken a clear stand against geopolitics and joined the B&R. Touching upon the philosophical East-West dialogue Brawer pointed to the deep influence of Confucius on the founder of the American republic: Benjamin Franklin. After a quote from President Xi Jinping speech at the UN, January 2017 “Towards a Community of Shared Future for Mankind,” Brawer ended with the quotes from Krafft Ericke from the book the {Extraterrestrial imperative: From Closed to Open World}, 1971, about the limitless development potential of space.

In his speech the Pakistani Ambassador praised the development corridor China is building in Pakistan from the Chinese border to the Indian Ocean port of Gwadar. It will open up the landlocked neighbor countries in Central Asia and also provide a shortcut into China for the Maritime Silk Road, he explained.

The Chargé d´Affairs of South Africa rose to the occasion as a member of BRICS and took a global perspective and not just African. He brought up the whole historical colonial past by referring to the Bandung conference defining the relations between Asia and Africa.

In the Q&A of first panel the ambassadors and Brawer answered

questions, where many of the points were sharpened.

This seminar came at a time where a massive mobilization in the media and think tank sector against the BRI, describing China as a new hegemon in the world. An unprecedented number of seminar have been and will be held around these days on the theme, and a new state-backed think tank, New Silk Road Observatory, will be established on June 4th, amid a lot of fanfare. The Schiller Institute Seminar is the only one with a positive and constructive tone. In answering questions, the Chinese Ambassador told the audience to ask the Schiller Institute if they had questions about the BRI, because they have the best knowledge of it. The effect on the audience was just that, as many persons said they wanted to invite the Schiller Institute for followups.