

SWEDISH BELT AND ROAD SEMINAR

A New Africa is Emerging with the Belt and Road

Dec. 8—Egypt’s Ambassador to Sweden, representing the African Union—which Egypt heads this year—greeted the 60 guests at the December 5 special seminar in Stockholm, which included nineteen diplomats from fifteen countries, most of them from Africa. Hussein Askary, one of two BRIX Board members, was a speaker, along with a former Norwegian parliamentarian. Both of them emphasized that BRIX does not exist to cheer on China or Africa, but rather the goal sought by BRIX is to bring Sweden into this process of cooperation. Askary made a point that should not be missed by Europe and United States: Those nations would be wise to not “miss the train towards economic prosperity and stability in the world.”

The seminar outlined the great progress being achieved in realizing Africa’s development goals in the context of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and explored the massive potential imbedded in making Africa the greatest economic powerhouse on the planet in the coming decades. Europe, as well as the rest of the West, can and should cooperate with the African nations and China to accelerate and benefit from this promising perspective in this kind of win-win economic approach.

Stephen Brawer, Vice-President of BRIX, who had



Belt and Road Institute’s (BRIX) seminar in Stockholm, Sweden, December 5, 2019.

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H.E. Alaa Hegazy, Ambassador of Egypt to Sweden.

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organized the event, welcomed everyone and gave a brief history of how BRIX came into being, and about its work so far. The BRIX, which is only one year old, emerged out of a high-level seminar on the strategic and economic impact of the BRI held in May 2018 and organized jointly by the Schiller Institute and the China-Sweden Business Council (CSBC). He emphasized that BRIX is committed to disseminating knowledge of BRI as a global development process, and to presenting a deeper reflection

on that process, to overcome opinion based on prejudice and geopolitical agendas.

Egypt’s Ambassador, Mr. Alaa Hegazy, emphasized the importance of the Belt and Road Initiative for the implementation of Africa’s development plans that are

only now beginning to take off. He presented the African Union's (AU) Agenda 2063 plan for a continental rail and road network, electrification, and industrialization. The Ambassador outlined the AU cooperation mechanisms with the EU, UN, Japan, and other nations, underscoring that cooperation with the BRI has been the most dynamic and effective of these mechanisms.



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H.E. Gui Congyou, Ambassador of China to Sweden.

The View from China

The Ambassador of the People's Republic of China to Sweden, Mr. Gui Congyou, in his keynote speech, detailed the extensive cooperation established between China and Africa in the context of the BRI, including the September 2018 Summit of the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) in Beijing and the results of that summit. He said:

China-Africa joint construction of the Belt and Road initiative has accelerated, and 40 African countries and the AU Commission have signed cooperation documents with China on the Belt and Road initiative. We have formulated a country plan based on the actual needs of Africa. We will implement a total of more than 880 China-Africa cooperation projects in the next three years.

Concerning Chinese-Swedish perspectives, Ambassador Gui stated that the Swedish government has many aid and cooperation projects for Africa, and many large Swedish companies such as Volvo, Scania, and ABB have extensive operations in Africa. China, he said, is



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H.E. Diriba Kuma, Ambassador of Ethiopia to Sweden.

willing to work with other countries in the world, including Sweden, to complement each other's strengths and make positive contributions to peace, stability and development in Africa.

Ethiopia's Ambassador, Diriba Kuma, reviewed some of the plans for modernization and industrialization now underway. Ethiopia, where the AU is headquartered, is well on its way to realizing its plans to become a middle-income country by 2025, transitioning from an agriculture-based society to an industry-based one. Ethiopia is a major beneficiary in the Belt and Road Initiative, he said—

since the country has embarked on expanding its infrastructure network across the nation—like roads, railways, telecom and airports—the technical as well as financial support from the Government of China side has helped a lot.

Ambassador Diriba explained that Ethiopia, in its program to become a middle-income country by 2025, has launched an ambitious plan of constructing 12 industrial parks across the nation. Major Chinese companies have participated in the construction of these industrial parks. Some Chinese companies are constructing their own industrial parks in Ethiopia. He emphasized that Ethiopia has a plan to have 30 industrial parks by the year 2025, saying that his nation is interested in working with “all competent companies to actively engage in this endeavor.”

Ambassador Diriba also reminded the audience that his country's Prime Minister, Dr. Abiy Ahmed, would be receiving the Nobel Peace Prize on December 10. This is an appropriate recognition of the path Ethiopia

has taken towards social, political and economic reform.

South Africa's Chargé d'Affaires, Duncan Sebefelo, discussed his country's economic visions and plans, and the challenges and opportunities that exist today. He spoke about the major investments China has made in key projects in South Africa and explained how important the BRI is for the development goals of the African continent.

Hussein Askary, gave a thorough presentation on retooling for Africa's rise. With the help of charts, photographs and maps, he showed how BRI is helping in realizing Africa's goals. Western attitudes towards Africa must change, he said. China considers Africa an opportunity, and said that "the aid mentality" is a major part of the problem. The Chinese approach of empowering, rather than merely helping, means supplying Africa with the tools for development—infrastructure, industrialization, and technology transfer. That works. The highest priority goals to be addressed, he said, are ending hunger and poverty; providing electricity and water; building healthcare and education; and undertaking industrialization. With the help of China and the BRI, Africa is well on the way to realizing its Agenda 2063. But, he asked, how much faster could this agenda be realized if Sweden and the EU were to contribute to it?

The Industrial Win-Win Potential

The Norwegian former member of parliament, Mr. Thore Vestby, who is also the co-founder of the Ichi Foundation (a Norwegian cultural and educational organization that promotes cooperation between China and Europe, as well as along the Belt and Road), spoke about Norwegian cooperation with Africa, which has been largely limited to aid through the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation. But a new focus on cooperation was established in 2012 by leading Norwegian companies



Duncan Sebefelo, Chargé d'Affaires at the South African Embassy in Stockholm.



Thore Vestby, former member of the Norwegian parliament.

through the [Norwegian African Business Association](#). Norway also needs to establish cooperation with BRI, Vestby emphasized, and a shift in Norway's attitude towards China and the BRI is necessary. He congratulated the Swedish BRIX for its successful work and announced that a BRIX Norway will be started in the new year.

BRIX member and private consultant Mr. Lars Aspling was happy to report that now 16 of 28 EU countries have already signed agreements (MOUs) with China to cooperate with the BRI. More such agreements, let alone more positive attitudes toward BRI, as recently expressed by France and Finland, will not necessarily divide the EU. There are no legal issues that hinder Sweden from joining the BRI; only a lack of political will stands in the way, he stated. He outlined the necessary investments that need to be made in Scandinavia and northern Europe to increase the levels of productivity necessary in the new BRI era.

All of the speakers took questions from the audience in the closing panel. BRIX Chairman Ulf Sandmark commented on a question about corruption in Africa by pointing out that the BRI has a focus on real investments, not the handing out of large sums of money, as has so often been done by Western nations. The BRI investments are delivered as cement, steel, machinery and other inputs for the projects. Cement is difficult to put into a bank account, which means that

BRIX has an intrinsic mechanism to prevent corruption, he said.

Brawer closed the seminar by emphasizing the need to present reliable information and knowledge about the BRI. He thanked TV100 for its important work in reporting the proceedings of the seminar. All of the speeches and discussion panels are posted, in Swedish, on the BRIX website (www.brixsweden.org) and social media outlets.