

Schiller Institute Addresses Serbia-China Conference in Belgrade

July 16—On July 12-13, the conference “Initiatives of the New Silk Road—Achievements and Challenges” took place in Belgrade, organized by the Institute of International Politics and Economics (IIPE) in Belgrade and the Institute of European Studies of the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS). Both institutes signed an agreement making the IIPE the Regional Center for Managing Scientific Projects as part of the cooperation format of the “16+1”—the 16 Central and Eastern European countries (CEEC) and China. Throughout the conference, the Serbian hosts and speakers prominently acknowledged the work of the Schiller Institute and of Helga Zepp-LaRouche personally, for advocating the New Silk Road policy.

The proceedings were opened by Branislav Dordovic, Director of the IIPE, followed by Serbian Secretary of State at the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technological Development Vladimir Popovic; the President of the Committee on Foreign Affairs of the National Assembly Zarko Obradovic; Li Manchang, Chinese Ambassador in Serbia, and by Mr. Huang Ping, Director General of the Institute of European Studies of CASS, who is also the Secretary General of 16+1 (CEEC) Think Tank networks.

Ambassador Li emphasized in his opening remarks that most of the projects in the context of 16+1 format have so far been implemented in Serbia. The first Chinese bridge in Europe was built here, the first visa-free arrangement between the two nations implemented, and the first steel mill in Europe bought by China. The first high-speed train project between Belgrade and Budapest will commence construction in November, as will other important industrial projects. He described the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a house put up by China; but the entire interior design depends on input by its participants.

Last June, during President Xi Jinping’s 2016 visit to Serbia, the just-concluded July 12-13 conference on the Danube River and the New Silk Road was jointly



Elke Fimmen (second from right), speaking at the July 12-13 conference in Belgrade.

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organized by the two institutes. This year, close to 50 scholars spoke at the one-and-half-day conference, representing 10 countries. Eleven speakers were from China (from CASS, the Chongqing Academy of Social Sciences, and from the Energy Development Research Center). It became clear that China has begun a more thorough approach to individual CEE countries, tasking teams of researchers to better understand the national characteristics of their partners.

Several of the Chinese speakers did not mince words on the problems faced by the Belt and Road Initiative policy in Europe, such as the EU’s “protectionism,” the anti-Russian sanctions, Ukraine crisis, and refugee problem, which will have to be solved, soon. Prof. Zhao Chen, chief of studies of international relations at the Institute of European Studies of CASS, dealt with BRI-European integration in his speech during the first session, “New Silk Road—Chinese Strategy of World Development.”

Prof. Zhao drew attention to EU concerns about Chinese engagement in Europe, in particular the problem of investments by Chinese state-owned enterprises in Europe. Focussing on the positive cooperation between the EU and the BRI process, he noted that improvement of economic development in infrastructure increases local productivity. Therefore, he concluded, Western European countries should enjoy the spill-over effects, as

they will be able to increase trade with such better developed new markets themselves. Since competition is not always bad, it could lead to better results and thereby force the EU to reform some of its outdated regulations and its bureaucratic system, which is itself protectionist.

In addition, he emphasized, the economic benefits of investment can prevent radicalization. The Belt and Road Initiative offers stability, which is important in regard to the problem of terrorism. He concluded, that it is not going to be an easy process, but this is a path of new possibilities in an uncertain era.

Elke Fimmen, representing the German Schiller Institute and *EIR*, spoke at the beginning of the first session on “The New Silk Road—Its Strategic Importance for World Peace.” She was introduced by Prof. Duzsko Dimitrijevic, a professorial fellow of the IIPE and the main organizer of the conference, who announced that she was from “the famous institute from Germany.” (In his concluding remarks for the day, Prof. Dimitrijevic again singled out the Schiller Institute’s work and contribution.)

Elke Fimmen highlighted Helga Zepp-LaRouche’s characterization of the Belt and Road Forum in Beijing, in which she participated, as a “very harmonious event,” giving hope to the participants especially from developing countries, and that the Belt and Road policy exemplifies a new global paradigm of win-win-cooperation instead of geopolitics for the first time in history. Throughout Fimmen’s 10-minute speech, the newly created German World Land-Bridge map was shown on the screen, drawing a lot of attention from the audience.

She focussed on the intensive diplomatic follow-up after the Belt and Road Forum summit, consolidating and expanding this spirit of cooperation for the benefit of world peace, leading up to the just-concluded G-20 Summit in Hamburg. Several noteworthy developments took place on the sidelines of the summit: the breakthrough meeting between Putin and Trump, and the cooperation between Trump and Xi—the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), as well as BRICS meetings, BRICS, Japanese-Russian-Chinese diplomacy, and above all the unprecedented new level of strategic cooperation between Russia and China on all levels.

If the leaders of China, Russia, and the United States can cooperate, she said, there is a chance to build a new global paradigm for peace and development, and to jointly overcome problems like underdevelopment, hunger, refugees, and the immediate danger of a financial crash.

One of the next speakers, Prof. Blagoje Babic, professorial fellow of the Committee for Economic Sci-

ence of the Serbian Academy of Sciences and Arts spoke on “The New Silk Road—Response for the Challenges of the Chinese Economy.” He closed his presentation with a moving personal reference to his pride in knowing for more than 26 years of the fight of Mrs. LaRouche and the Schiller Institute for the concept of a New Silk Road, which “incidentally” turns out to be the same concept that is now being realized by China.

The many interesting topics by Serbian, as well as speakers from Bosnia, Poland, Bulgaria, Romania, Russia, the United States, Germany, and of course China, will soon be published in a book by the IIPE.

Some of the highlights included a thorough review by Dr. Jasminka Simic, researcher and editor at RTS Serbia (National TV), on inter-regional connectivity and China’s emphasis on setting the pace with future technologies and breakthroughs; and independent German space journalist Jacquelin Myrrhe—who had addressed the recent Krafft Ehrlicke conference in Munich—who emphasized that China’s Space Program and the “Space Silk Road” supported global progress, which surprised the audience and had an uplifting effect. Edita Stojic Karanovic of the International Scientific Forum “Danube—River of Cooperation,” spoke on the “New Silk Road and the Regional Cooperation of the Western Balkans” and the Morava-Vardar-Axios canal project.

A question was raised, as an interesting principled reflection, during the debate on the second day of the conference, about the “profitability” of Silk Road train connections to Europe. Dr. Jędrzej Czeręp from the Amicus Europae Foundation in Warsaw pointed out that while at first, trains were going back to China empty, now better export-opportunities have led to a rise of local production in several sectors (mineral water, fruits, dairy products) and a higher volume of cargo shipped from Poland to China.

While there are obviously still many problems to overcome, not the least being the EU obstruction policies which have greatly contributed to the deindustrialization of Serbia, the overall process of discussion at this conference clearly showed the great potential for win-win cooperation between the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative, Serbia, and the other CEE countries and Europe as a whole.

But it is Western European countries—above all Germany—which have to change their approach quickly to a constructive one, instead of empty words and doctrinaire conditionalities—to not miss the boat of the paradigm change already taking place in this region of the world.