



Conference Report

REGIONAL PROGRAMME
POLITICAL DIALOGUE
ASIA, SINGAPORE
May 2015

INTERNATIONALE ZUSAMMENARBEIT

International Conference


“Nationalism in Asia and Europe”

Singapore
7-8 May 2015

On 7-8 May, 2015, the regional programme Political Dialogue with Asia of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung and the East Asian Institute at the National University of Singapore organized an International Conference **“Nationalism in Asia and Europe”** in Singapore.


Since nationalistic movements have been on the resurgence in Asia and Europe in recent years, 62 participants discussed the role of nationalism in the 21st century. The scope of discussions included the various forms of domestic and external dynamics of nationalism in Europe and East Asia. A number of countries use such sentiments to gain legitimacy and foster national coherence. Participants analyzed the relationship between nationalism and security, given that effective conflict prevention measures are missing. Another dilemma is the competition between regionalism and nationalism as the latter hinders a deeper regional integration. Due to the evolvement of the internet, nationalistic debates are less space-bound nowadays and people use the anonymity of the internet to disseminate discriminatory ideas. This requires new legislations and ways to enforce them.

The key note speech was delivered by *Dr. Dileep Padgaonkar*, Symbiosis International University and former Editor of The Times of India. He highlighted that nationalism itself is a vast concept and no consensus exists on its clear definition. It was first introduced by the European empires and later anti-colonial nationalism gained momentum. Today, nationalistic ideas are often driven by xenophobia and in the context of multi-ethnic societies. They are also used to gain legitimacy for certain policy approaches. This is reinforced through social media which might not lead to more understanding through engagement but dissemination of divisive ideas. International organizations such as the UN and IMF have also created nationalistic backlashes as they are perceived as being partisan.



In the first panel *Prof. Jungmin Seo*, Yonsei University, South Korea, and *Dr. Claire Sutherland*, Durham University, UK, discussed **Nationalism in the 21st Century**. While many states today focus on their own history, it is important to reflect on the shared memories. The national identity of most East Asian states is based on the experience during the colonial and war times. It is more than the modern common economic community it is often portrayed as. Today, mainly security concerns drive emphases on national ideas in Asia. The essential marker of today's nationalism in Europe is not so much the other state, but migrants. Many locals feel threatened by migrants and draw clear boundaries. In this context, immigrants reflect on the hosting nation as civic-nationalist states integrate migrants while chauvinistic-nationalist ones exclude them. Nationalism is, however, not inherently aggressive and negative as it helps people to order the world and their very own lives.

Domestic Dynamics of nationalism in Europe were addressed by *Assoc. Prof. Anders Hellström*, Malmö University, Sweden, and *Assoc. Prof. Aleksandar Pavkovic*, Macquarie University, Australia. Any debate on nationalism has to be seen in the particular socio-political context of the respective nation. It depends on this context what is normal to say and do with regard to identity, diversity and immigration, ultimately defining what is nationalistic. All four Northern European countries – Denmark, Sweden, Norway and Finland – have seen an increase in the share of votes among nationalist parties. But at the same time not all of them were able to create an impact on domestic politics. This impact depends on whether the parties are able to link their idea to the mainstream through radicalizing it or remain in an isolated position. Particularly the Sweden Democrats have not yet been able to take this step. While this form of nationalism tries to unify the nation, secessionist movements try to destabilize it. Establishing a regional nationalism of its own will, however, not be enough to secede. The decisive factor is rather whether the nation states recognized equal status for the subgroup. If this status is recognized, people are unlikely to support secession even if they feel that they have different identity features. Historical facts and pre-current state independence of a region might also not play such a strong role as assumed. External factors such as the support of a guardian power or potential negative consequences from exiting the nation state seem to be more impactful.




Dr. Shan Wei, East Asian Institute, Singapore, *Assoc. Prof. Zhang Yun*, National Niigata University, Japan, and *Dr. Khin Zwa Win*, Tampadipa Institute, Myanmar, showed characteristics of **Domestic Dynamics of Nationalism in Asia**. Chinese nationalism is strongly connected to conservative orientations in politics, economy and culture. The younger and older generations are particularly nationalistic. The reasons for the older generation might be the Japanese occupation and foundation of the People's Republic, while the younger people might be influenced by the success of the system and also recent external aspects such as the tensions and a more self-confident acting Beijing. Sino-Japanese relations show the abnormality that the interdependence is high, but the political relationship is poisonous. Confrontational statements by official authorities are made on an almost daily basis and national sentiments vis-a-vis the other state are used to gain legitimacy which then results in an even more aggressive international behavior. However, this use of nationalistic behavior on the international stage does not translate into more domestic support so far. Myanmar is a special case as it is still a nation-building in progress. The country has many narratives of nationalism due to its diverse ethnic groups, but not one nation yet. The Burman Buddhist nationalism is a unique character trait of the country. It played a crucial role in the struggle for independence in the 1940s. In the context of recent political reforms, this Buddhist nationalism re-gained momentum and affected the Muslim minority group of the Rohingya.

The panel **Nationalism and Regionalism** discussed the apparent contradiction between these two concepts in East Asia, Southeast Asia and Europe. According to *Prof. Joo Jaewoo*, Kyung Hee University, South Korea, regionalism in East Asia was developing well despite certain tensions. These included particularly the trilateral meetings and frequent bilateral visits between China, Japan and South Korea. However, the trilateral meetings were stopped in 2013 and only in April 2015 the first trilateral Foreign Ministers' Meeting in three years was held in Korea. Especially since 2012, many provocative nationalistic actions took place in all three countries, but different from the Japan-China relations which have not seen a mutual visit since 2009, the bilateral meetings between China and South Korea continued. *Assoc Prof Herman Joseph S. Kraft*, University of the Philippines, Philippines, highlighted that it is very difficult to speak of one national identity or nationalism for each of the ASEAN Member States as there are many ethnic



nationalism which differ from the state-led version. Some of these have national and independence aspirations which are the opposite of regional integration. A certain contradiction can be found in the ASEAN Charter – the political sphere – which talks about the promotion of an ASEAN identity but at the same time emphasizes the principle of respect for the independence, sovereignty, equality, territorial integrity and *national identity* of all ASEAN Member States. In the economic dimension, the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint pursues the establishment of a regional market integration. This objective, however, faces clear obstacles in the capacity and willingness of Member States to achieve the proclaimed targets on economic liberalization. In the security dimension, ASEAN Centrality is a key principle. It will be challenging to sustain this in the face of increasing great power dynamics, rising inter-state issues pushed by competing national interests and unresolved intra-state conflicts. While ASEAN has been able to foster regional cooperation and prevent inter-state tensions, it is now at a critical point to address the more than purely institutional challenges posed by increasingly strident nationalist forces at different levels. *Prof Ireneusz Pawel Karolewski*, University of Wroclaw, Poland, discussed whether Euro-Nationalism is on the rise. Nationalism beyond the nation-state and globalized nationalism have three key elements - a form of belonging through a community of fate; secondly, boundaries through competitive relationship with others e.g. migrants and lastly, an external projection of identity from members onto non-members. Although the European Union has been promoting a collective identity and solidarity for more than 20 years, different forms of nationalism still exist. This is also due to recurrent crises of the EU. The collective identity tries to establish a 'we'-feeling, solidarity and readiness to sacrifice among its members. It is particularly important to enhance the legitimacy of the unity. The Euro-nationalism is less aggressive than those of nation-states as this would create more resistance. But this nationalism lite was able to establish collective symbols and rituals such as the Euro, anthem, flag, passport and several memorial days. It also possesses a founding myth of peace, prosperity and democracy. The EU has a positive self-image as a civilian and normative power which uses diplomacy instead of military peacemaking. But recently this nationalism lite has a weaker appeal and the peace process is less important to the youth. Thus, the EU uses fundamental rights as a new myth. Ultimately, the outcome of the Euro-crisis will be a defining moment and external enemies could be a new identity stabilizing factor. But due to its



diversity, it is difficult to find common grounds within the EU and name something very specific European. Therefore, common political projects are important and the EU should not compete with the nationalism of the Member States.

Assoc Prof Zhang Yijiang, University of Tokyo, Japan, *Dr Lim Tai Wei*, East Asian Institute, Singapore and *Prof Pham Hong Tung*, Vietnam National University, Vietnam, took a closer look at the external dimension of **Nationalism in East Asia and Southeast Asia**. The use of nationalism in external relations can take various forms in Asian countries. A prominent example in recent years is the education sector where countries use textbooks to promote a specific narrative of past events. As this starts at a young age and often has one-sided interpretations, it will impact the foreign relations vis-a-vis neighboring states in future. The most critical external relations in East Asia are certainly the one between China and Japan. Observers see both pessimistic and optimistic developments. One factor contributing to this was the frequent changes within the Japanese administration, but with Abe's victories there is now a chance for more stable relations. Especially in 2014, indications for a thawing process of the relationship could be seen as leaders met for the first time in over two years despite many near misses in the East China Sea. In Southeast Asia, domestic and external forms of nationalism are closely linked. Many countries like Vietnam have long struggled to establish a nation and patriotism due to their inherent diversity. Uprisings of discriminated minorities have often challenged Vietnamese nationalism but also enhanced solidarity among non-minority members. Recently external events fostered stronger cohesiveness among the Vietnamese. Examples in case are disputes on sovereignty in the lower Mekong delta when Cambodians burnt Vietnamese flags or competition in the South China Sea resulting in anti-China protests in 2014.

In the final panel *Assoc Prof Zhang Xialong*, University of Nottingham, United Kingdom, *Dr KyuJin Shim*, Singapore Management University, and *Assoc Prof Marko Skoric*, City University of Hong Kong, debated **Nationalism and the Role of the Internet**. The most important online platform in China is 'we chat'. While the government encourages liberalism on the internet, it minimizes the political risks by control. The political discourse seems to be clustered around a small number of recurring themes with nationalism being the most notable one. National sentiments are mostly reflected over the Nanjing Massacre and the Diaoyu /



Senkaku Islands dispute. Especially anti-Japanese content is found easily. This might reflect a different attitude regarding censorship and the question is whether the government leaves these discussions on going as they fulfill its purpose. In Korea, a similar website on which a lot of anti-foreign content is being shared is ILBE. It also includes hate and far-right positions against more liberal and pro-democratic Korean forces. This reflects a more critical attitude of the younger generation towards democracy and a generation gap which poses a real threat to the Korean society. The narrative of the far-right is to use nationalism for entertainment and they present themselves as lawyer or doctors to gain more credibility. Most of the ILBE users are male and a male chauvinism can be identified due to personal challenges of finding a wife and achieving career goals. Female internet users are more dominant on facebook and Instagram where they can build a relationship. In general, social media centers around an ego and the ties are usually weak or latent. But they can be activated if necessary. Political expression on social media will always lead to exposure to political differences as they are meant for a specific audience, but selection is not possible. The reactions can be cutting of ties, shielding against not opinion-reinforcing posts, reposting to gain support or self-censorship to not offend contacts. While studies show that political expression and exposure to disagreement on social media have implications similar to those in other media environments, such exposure may be more common in the digital domain. Different from reality, the reactions are often uncivil and flaming. The exposure to disagreement is generally good for democracy and engagement with community, but partisan and protest participation need opinion reinforcement, not conflict or ambiguity.

Conclusion

The conference underlined current nationalistic developments in Europe and Asia. It showed how the connections between domestic and external dimensions are in many cases flawless and even reinforcing. The participants agreed that national sentiments should not be misused to gain legitimacy and that regional cooperation has to be enhanced to avoid distrust and tensions.