

Opening Speech

6-7 May 2010

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Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen

China is without doubt one of the major players in the globalized world of the 21st century. Its rapid transformation as well as those from other emerging economies such as India or Brazil cannot be disregarded by the US or Europe. It clearly modifies the balance of the global order. This was clearly perceptible during the last multilateral round of negotiations at the WTO. In the Doha development agenda, contrarily to the Uruguay round, the US and Europe could not impose their agenda. The Copenhagen conference also underlined the rising role of China on the issue of global climate and environment. In the midst of the global economic crisis, the role of China will be determinant in the finding of solution to build a new global financial system in order to stabilize the world economy. The recent acceleration of the penetration of Chinese firms in Africa and the rising role of China as aid and technology provider to third world countries challenges the existing relations between the developed and the developing world. These elements point out that a balanced and workable global governance cannot be achieved without China.

Since its opening more than 30 years ago and even earlier, China has always promoted a multipolar global governance to avoid the unilateralism of a single superpower. China had high expectations, believing that Europe could help to build this post-cold war multipolar world. However Europe has turned to be a difficult partner to understand for the Chinese as it is not a superstate. Europe is certainly a key player in the global trade governance. However if one considers finance, environment or energy, Europe's role is far less obvious. In terms of security, there is still no unity among member states on key issues and Europe lacks united hard power.

These last years, disappointment could be felt among Chinese and other emerging countries over the role of Europe in global governance. Sometimes, Europe lacked clarity or unity and Europe is perceived by many emerging powers as aligning itself too often on US positions.

China's natural rise in world affairs combined with the inability of Europe to speak with a single voice could generate difficulties to build a sustainable governance system that takes into account the rebalancing of global power. This conference will attempt to analyze the Chinese and European views on the key global issues that are the restructuring of the world trading system; the world financial system; global warming; energy and security. Through this exercise, we hope to increase the mutual understanding between these two great players.

Indeed, in a world characterized by an unprecedented degree of interdependency in the economic, financial, environmental, energy and security spheres, neglecting to deepen one's understanding of another major global player is simply not an option. The responses to the unprecedented challenges of this 21st century will necessitate in depth understanding.

That's why the Madariaga – College of Europe Foundation, the InBev-Baillet Latour Chairs EU-China at K.U.Leuven, UCL and the College of Europe, the Leuven Centre for Global Governance Studies, the Institutes for European Studies at FUSL and UCL and the European Economic and Social Committee have been so eager to organize this conference in this period of global crisis. During our two-day conference, we hope that the contributions and debates from the eminent experts that we have gathered will give you a better understanding of these key issues.

I will now give the floor back to Professor Jan Wouters to present our two distinguished keynote speakers.