

Address
by
His Royal Highness Prince El Hassan bin Talal
of
The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan

**GLOBALISATION AND CULTURE:
CHINA AND THE ARAB WORLD**

at the
Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs

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Beijing

H.E. Ambassador Mei Zaorong
(*President of Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs*)

Excellencies:

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Dear Friends:

It is a pleasure for me to be with you here today in Beijing at the Chinese People's Institute of Foreign Affairs (CPIFA) with so many scholars and eminent personalities. I have come here to learn more about China, its people and its culture which has contributed so much to human civilisation over the millennia.

China (in terms of purchasing power parity, PPP) is the world's second largest economy. The rapid economic development of China provides tremendous opportunities for the world economy in general and for the developing countries in particular.

It is hoped that, as they move into the 21st century, the advanced industrial countries will respond positively and appropriately to this opportunity. Unfair trading arrangements and protectionism are policies of the past in considering a new framework for international economic relations.

It has been reported in the media that the recent vote on May 24th in the United States House of Representatives on trade with China (Permanent Normal Trade Relations, PNTR), is of more importance for the U.S. rather than for China. Analysts consider that it strengthened international confidence in America's ability to deliver on its negotiated international commitments. It boosted the hopes of free-traders and as one observer said, it demonstrated that the US Administration has put principle above political expediency.

International observers consider that China's entry into the WTO is assured with or without the Congressional approval of PNTR. The conclusion of the agreement between China and the EU on May 19th was an important landmark in terms of promoting a more appropriate framework for international economic cooperation. „China has to conclude with a few more countries, of course there is the PNTR vote, and of course China must complete the multilateral process in Geneva.“¹

During the past two decades, China has achieved the fastest rate of economic development to be realised by any nation in the world. With growth rates averaging 8% per annum, output has quadrupled since 1979.

There are ten Arab countries that signed agreements with the WTO and four with the EU. It is possibly the cumulative effect of these bilateral agreements that is encouraging regional conversations. Arab countries' level of per capita income has declined by about a fifth in the last quarter of the 20th century. The Arab world can only benefit from developing closer cooperation with China.

If multilateralism prospers, it is not a zero-sum game. However, continued bilateralism means that the poor continue to pay. A great deal can be learnt from China's experience in many respects, including its „Special Economic Zones“. In addition, China's efforts to promote cooperation with its neighbours, including India and Pakistan, provides an example to the Arab world.

Also it is important to keep in mind China's support for the transnational or transboundary cooperative development plan of the Tumen Delta (involving Russia and both North and South Korea), as well as its support for other sub-regional groupings in South-East Asia such as the countries of the Mekong Delta.

This provides a practical illustration of the concept of '*aménagement de territoires*'. It was Monnet and Schumann in the

¹ EU-China Agreement on WTO, 19th May, 2000 - *European Trade Commissioner Pascal Lamy*

context of Europe, in the early 1980s, who were able to introduce extra-national thinking in a concept aimed at the better utilisation of resources. APEC is another framework that has been promoted by China and its regional and global partners.

This is one reason why countries in West Asia and Africa, including the Arab world, felt that Europe was, in a sense, leaping over their heads toward China and Asia when ASEM was launched in 1996.

Of course, the new European strategy to develop a more appropriate multilateral framework for cooperation with China and Asia on an equal basis is to be welcomed in the form of ASEM I and ASEM II. But it is important that intra-regional frameworks of cooperation do not evolve in isolation from each other.

We should seek a complimentary and intra-independent formula of global partnership. China's strategy is based on inclusion rather than exclusion. This applies to our part of the world in West Asia, which is the Asian rim of Europe. In fact, West Asia links East Asia and China with Europe.

The Middle East has no overarching regional forum to address its economic, political, socio-cultural and security concerns. The Multilateral Track of the Middle East peace process (in which China participates) was re-launched earlier this year. It is born of the inspiration of the Helsinki process and stimulated by the Barcelona process. Yet, its full activation is hindered by the slow progress in the bilateral tracks. The Barcelona Process interacts with the twelve Mediterranean countries and the fifteen EU members. The Arab League seeks to realise its objectives of closer cooperation among its member states.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Turning to the Eastern Mediterranean / Black Sea region, I was encouraged by the recent statement made by the leaders of the religious communities in the Balkans calling for dialogue and reconciliation. When signing their „Statement of Shared Moral Commitment“ of 13th April, the three leaders focused on how they, as religious leaders, „can take concrete steps together to work for a better future for all people of Kosovo“. I could not but feel saddened, however, about the missed opportunity of having possibly avoided the bloodshed in that region had the proposal, made by the late President Ozal of Turkey and myself, to set up a centre for crisis avoidance in Istanbul initially discussed in 1984, materialised.

The importance of crisis avoidance centres has more recently been vindicated by bodies such as the World Conference on Religion and Peace (WCRP)². Also the International Crisis Group (ICG), chaired by our friend George Mitchell, is to be commended for their work in Northern Ireland. The work of such bodies covers the Balkans, Ireland, Soweto, Jakarta and South Africa among other areas.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

Working alongside His Majesty the late King Hussein, we have always believed in a wider regional perspective to address the challenges facing our different communities. For a number of years I have referred to the „Arc of Crisis“ extending from the Maghreb in North Africa to the Arabian Sea, and from Sudan to the North of the Caspian Sea. It is also useful to refer to the energy ellipse extending from the Arabian Gulf to Kazakhstan which contains 70% and 40% of the world oil and gas reserves. If the new pipelines from Russia to Turkey or from the Caspian through Iran are to stabilise their hinterland, then they too will contribute to regional stability beyond hard security and military alternatives.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

In the social context of seeking non-traditional sources of finance in „politics where people matter“, may I draw your attention to a study about The Marshall Plan for Eastern Europe, which was published after the end of the Cold War by Thieme Associates, a German Group. I speak of the Treuhandt period. Their argument was that a long-term strategy and commitment by the pension funds for stable investment in Eastern Europe was needed rather than the reliance on speculative surges in short-term financial flows and hot money. A small proportion (5%) of the huge assets of western pension funds, would suffice to provide a source of stable long-term investment in Eastern Europe through a transparent framework and government guarantees to repay the initial amounts including a modest interest rate after twenty years.

Secondly, may I draw your attention to the teachings of Islam which ensure that Zakat (alms giving) is an effective tool to combat poverty and its causes. At the Eighth Islamic Summit in Tehran in December 1997, I asked the conference to adopt practical measures needed to establish an international Zakat Fund. In 1987 and 1994, at the UN General Assembly, I addressed the importance of making peace with

² His Royal Highness Prince Hassan was elected Moderator of the World Conference on Religion and Peace in November, 1999.

emphasis on human suffering, civilian victims and vulnerable groups at times of conflict.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

We should think creatively in terms of a sustainable scientific and technological revolution, as well as the economic globalisation process. They have opened up huge opportunities, which were not available before. At the same time, they have given the economic dimension precedence over everything else, including culture as Mary Robinson, UNHCHR, mentioned in preparing for the conference against xenophobia to be held in South Africa next year.

Cultural particularities have thus begun to emerge as defensive identities for peoples and cultural groups fearful of marginalisation and domination by other cultures. In this context, we have much to learn from the Chinese civilisation which has always been fascinated with harmony, symmetry and even asymmetry – concepts which have found their way even to the sciences, particularly physics.

Any world-wide proposal, in order to have legitimacy for all concerned, must be related to the various religious, cultural, legal traditions. If this can be done, globalisation will not be perceived as a western or American imposition on the rest of humankind. Globalisation will be accepted as a way to modernise and enlarge each tradition while remaining faithful to its roots.

By the same token, each tradition will discover that the challenges human beings faced for centuries were met in more or less similar ways. In doing so, different civil societies might be inclined to accept the other as a brother sharing the same human destiny and not as a potential enemy or barbarian.

Contemporary focus on globalisation is pertinent; but it is nothing new in the annals of human civilisation. It is, however, true that the faster we move towards universalisation, more and more cultural particularities emerge. I think there can be no process of globalisation without recognising the cultural, religious and historical heritage of the other party. In my work with Intellectual Property, I have noticed this in conversation with my Chinese colleagues, e.g. how can you call for perfection in industry when you are addressing a civilisation with 5,000 years of knowledge in the development of jade?

Once again, I would like to suggest that in terms of the cultural background, this particular element should be taken into consideration if

we are to avoid the unraveling of the nation state. I would like to refer to the importance of the redefinition of sovereignty and the redefinition of statehood from Quebec to Timor.

Dear Friends:

Within a framework of positive interaction, we are partners in a world which is becoming increasingly interconnected and interdependent, and where borders are becoming less meaningful or even disintegrating. We are moving toward a single world with a single agenda; but we would like all peoples and all cultures to contribute to the formulation of this agenda so that it will reflect our mutual interests and concerns.

For a single world with a single agenda formulated according to the value system of one culture – to the exclusion of others – will be a world in which injustice and marginalisation will inevitably lead to conflict and further to war. However, „One World with Ten Thousand Cultures“, as Professor Mircea Malitza of the University of the Black Sea in Bucharest put it, a world in which commonalities are the foundation and particularities are the cornerstones, will be characterised by cooperation. This is the only possible basis for common living and the joint action necessary for the construction of a brighter future in which all individuals and communities have the means to achieve their potential.

We cannot overemphasise the importance of culture in our world. The definition of culture is really dependent on the exigencies of the national or political requirements of the day. [I would like to reiterate that ‘short-termism’ is the plague of the ages.] I, therefore, strongly advocate the proposal made earlier by the late Lord Menuhin before the European Parliament in 1997 to establish a „Parliament of Cultures“³ composed of influential cultural figures. The time has come for us to work hand in hand for the causes in which we believe, instead of confining our efforts to merely renouncing what is wrong.

The false accusations directed against the Arab-Islamic civilisation are partially due to ignorance. For this civilisation was a global civilisation throughout its long history. Numerous peoples and cultures had coexisted and mingled within it.

We have worked for so many years against certain undesirable trends. Against anti-Semitism, against Islamophobia, against apartheid,

³ „Justification for the Assembly of Cultures: Reasons and Urgency“, presented by Lord Menuhin to the European Parliament, Brussels, 21st. November 1997.

against xenophobia and against discrimination. They said in the house of Walter Sisulu that the time has come to work for something.

Ladies and Gentlemen:

There is a need to go beyond the „isms“, whether religious or ideological to humanitarian universal values. This will bring about a focus on human solidarity beyond the culture of survival, through the culture of participation to the culture of peace.

I would like to think that my visit to you in Beijing will modestly contribute to working together for a better future for all regions and cultures of the world.

Thank you.