

Udenrigsministerens tale ved konferencen “Asian Diversity in a Global Context” på Københavns Universitet den 11. november.

Thank you, Rector Ralf Hemmingsen. And thank you to the organizers and all the participants in this important and timely conference on “Asian Diversity in a Global Context”. I am very pleased - and honored - to get the opportunity to make the opening speech today.

From my recent visit to Shanghai I have seen with my own eyes that things are not only moving fast in Asia, they are moving extremely fast. I also saw that rapid development brings amazing achievements and opportunities, but also new challenges. Be they social, cultural, political or economic.

The new dynamics in Asia cannot be sufficiently understood from the perspective of a single discipline. The cross-disciplinary nature of this conference will hopefully contribute to a deeper and more realistic insight into the political, economic and cultural changes facing especially Asia today. And with a broad range of representatives from the international society – including academics, NGO’s, media, embassies and government officials - I believe the stage is set

for some very fruitful discussions on a whole range of fundamental questions of common interest.

The dramatic shift in the distribution of economic and political power from West to East and South is a well-known narrative. And it is an event of such magnitude that it seems appropriate to use the term “a game-changer”. The realignment of the global balance of power and the changes, which this implies for international politics, will affect us all. It will put new demands on us. And the way we handle these changes and challenges will likely be of decisive importance for how our societies will evolve over the next decade.

Furthermore, the realignment of the global balance of power will not only affect the economic and political relations between the West, the East and the South, but it will also affect the cultural and social ties that connect us all. In short, a new world order is taking shape, where emerging powers with high economic growth rates like China, India and Brazil will be far more assertive politically.

So – Ladies and Gentlemen - this is a time to act, but it is also a time to reflect and understand the transformation taking place, and the changes this transformation will entail. Only if we reflect and understand can we act with purpose and avoid some of the misunderstandings which naturally follow from these global changes.

Asia has long been the “Engine of Globalization” and continues to be the continent of vast economic opportunities. Especially China is moving with a remarkable speed. During my visit to Shanghai I met with the president of Huawei which is not very well known in the West, but it is the world’s second largest telecommunications company. It is second only to Sony Ericsson, but with an annual growth rate of 50%.

But also in India, South Korea and Indonesia are things moving extremely fast. Japan has for almost thirty years been an economic giant. This creates new possibilities for commercial and knowledge-based cooperation between Asia and the rest of the world.

Notwithstanding its sometimes rather jagged development, Asia's political transformation over the last 20 years – the region-wide embrace of democracy – may be as important as its economic transformation in determining Asia's future. Today more people live under democratic rule in Asia than in any other region in the world.

Nevertheless, Asia is still faced with several unresolved inter-state security and cultural disputes that continue to pose challenges not only to regional security, stability and development, but also to the safety and well-being of the rest of the world.

At the same time, Asia continues to be the continent of diversity - linguistically, culturally, religiously as well as economically and politically. The economic differences in Asia are enormous, with some of the wealthiest countries in the world, such as Japan and Singapore, and a number of the poorest, like Bangladesh, Myanmar and Nepal. Economic progress has been distributed very unevenly. Measured in GDP per capita, the difference in income between the richest EU Member State – Luxembourg - and the poorest EU Member State – Bul-

garia – is trivial compared to the richest country in Asia - Singapore and the poorest - Cambodia.

So if we are to understand Asia – and Asia’s changing role in the world – we need to understand the vast differences that also characterize Asia as well as the conflicting interests and the sometimes combustible dynamics of Asian politics.

As Asia’s economic and political influence increases, so does the expectation that this influence will be matched by an equal share of global responsibility. Today’s Asia has the economic and political magnitude to make an active contribution to solving regional and global problems in a manner that promotes peace, stability and prosperity for all.

This is especially true when it comes to regional stability in Asia. Be it on the Korean peninsula or in dealing with the newly elected government in Myanmar. But tackling wider regional and global challenges such as Afghanistan, international terrorism or climate change requires strong cooperation between all major global actors, if we are to succeed. And Asia is now an indispensable part of

global solutions. In essence, this is what I have in mind, when I say “game-changer.”!

It is clear that it will take some time for the old global actors – Europe not least – to find their feet in this new world order. But let’s be clear. We all share the responsibility of handling the sweeping changes in the best way possible. It is not only our responsibility. Obviously, it is in our own interest as well.

If we are unprepared or ignorant, the ongoing redistribution of political and economic power from the West towards the East and South will likely create new tensions. If managed in the right way, however, I believe that the changing world order also has the potential to unlock opportunities for strengthened cooperation and significant reforms of our societies. I strongly believe the prospects are good, if we focus on the many opportunities for cooperation which are on offer today and resist the temptation to cry foul, because we don’t like the competition coming from Asia.

Most importantly, we need to realize that the current changes call for more – not less - dialogue and cooperation between Europe and Asia, and not to mention the US, Latin America and Africa. That is why we need a new global framework to assist us in pursuing global solutions. A framework adapted to the realities of today.

It is against this background that we see calls for a reinvigorated multilateral institutions and growing demands for fundamental reforms of the current system. Existing institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the WTO are increasingly being challenged as global agenda-setters by more informal and less rule-based configurations such as the G20. If we wish to continue to be successful in our foreign policy, we also have to work through these new informal channels.

The existence and prominence of G20, however, does not change the fact that the existing system of global governance is an essential framework for our foreign policy. It is far from being a perfect system, but we have to keep our focus on reforming what we have, including the UN instead of trying to dream up some new wonderful institution, which would require the perfect world to see

the light of day. The reality is that all of us need a legitimate system of global governance that fits the changes taking place in the world today and not the world as it looked like in 1945. In simple terms, we need a better match for the 21st century.

As Asia grows – economically and politically - our differences will from time to time seem larger. We will continue to have a different approach on some issues like political freedoms, human rights and the role of the state. These different views should, however, be discussed as part of an honest and open dialogue. A dialogue based on mutual respect between equal partners.

This dialogue will be deeper and stronger as we gain more knowledge of each other. As we begin to understand what binds us together and what sets us apart. This is why a conference like this one is important and this is indeed why it is important that academics, practitioners, activists and politicians continue to discuss, explore and questions each other.

Allow me a final remark: We are already witnessing situations where Europe together with the rest of the world are looking to Tokyo, Beijing, New Delhi, Seoul, Jakarta, and other Asian capitals to play an active and leading role in finding solutions to global challenges. They cannot be addressed without active involvement of Asia.

Personally, I strongly believe that an even more active Asia on the global scene will only strengthen the likelihood of fostering a more secure and stable world for future generations. Asia is quite simply not something to be feared, but something to be cheered.

Thank you for your attention.