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## Key Takeaways

### FPCI Global Town Hall Series #6

#### The Rising Tide: China's Rise and Its Global Implications

Virtually Held on Thursday, 16 May 2024

15.30 - 17.00 Jakarta Time (GMT +7)

Rewatch the session here: <https://youtu.be/Faz1AyGbB-w?si=dCZpD3fHvqwlDRNk>

#### **A. ABOUT THE SESSION**

The growth of China's economic, political, diplomatic, military, cultural, social and technological capabilities and credibility have become one of the defining features of 21st century world affairs. Within a few years, China is set to overtake the US as the world's largest economy. China has become a key trading partner to many countries in Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America. The growth of China's power also comes with a greater sense of global entitlement and ambition.

China's rise has fueled a greater sense of insecurities in the western world, who see China as a systemic competitor and rival. The US in particular sees China as a country that has the capability to undermine its primacy in world affairs. Countries in the global south, with some exceptions, have generally been open minded and welcoming towards China's rise. All in all, there is no question that China's rise has reshaped the world order in the 21st century.

Against this backdrop, FPCI will convene a Global Town Hall Series on “**What does China's rise mean to the rest of the world?**” hailing speakers from North-South-East-West to share their views on how China's rise is seen from their respective countries.

#### **B. SPEAKERS**

1. **Cobus van Staden**, Senior Research Affiliate with SAILA, Managing Editor of the China Global South Project
2. **Dr. Ceren Ergenç**, Research Fellow, Foreign Policy Unit, Centre for European Policy Studies, Brussels
3. **Julia Ganter**, Körber Emerging Middle Powers Initiative Program Director and Editor-in-Chief of The Berlin Pulse, Körber-Stiftung

### **C. SUMMARY**

- a. Speakers noted that many Global South countries, including South Africa, view China's ascent as an opportunity. **This perspective isn't necessarily about aligning with China, but rather seeing China as a disruptor of the current global system, which brings potential benefits.** In particular, China has significantly invested in infrastructure in Africa, transforming several African nations and allowing other emerging powers to gain influence. This shift has also underscored the lack of similar development initiatives from Western powers. It wasn't until China's involvement that Western powers began responding with their own infrastructure projects, such as the Global Gateway from Europe.
- b. **The significant impact of China's rise on Germany are most evident in three main areas: the economy, international expectations, and security.** It was highlighted that the substantial trade volume between Germany and China, amounted to 253 billion euros last year, nearly doubled over the past decade. With China being Germany's second-largest export market after the US, the economic benefits have been considerable, historically due to the complementary nature of their economies. However, more recently, Germany and China have become competitors.
- c. Regarding security, Germany expects China to play a crucial role in resolving current conflicts. From a European perspective, China is expected to leverage its connections with Russia, particularly concerning the situation in Ukraine, with the expectation that China will utilize these channels for constructive engagement. Additionally, Germany expects China to take on more responsibility in conflicts like those in Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, and other global hotspots, reflecting Germany's growing expectations of China's role on the international stage.
- d. Turkey welcomes China's rise as a global power and is open to cooperation with China in initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, and BRICS. However, despite supporting a non-Western multipolar international system, Turkey has reservations about China's emergence as a dominant power. And while **Turkey welcomes any attempts for non-Western multipolarity in the international system, China is not necessarily the emerging power that Turkey would like to see on stage.**
- e. Turkey's reservations stemmed from the cultural history linked with the people of Uyghur. China's Uyghur minority in Xinjiang has long standing linguistic, religious, and ethnic connections with Turkey, as well as a history of migration and asylum following the 1949 revolution and the establishment of the PRC. **Today, this results in a duality within Turkey: while the government is committed to fostering constructive relations with China, recognizing its rising economic and political power, there remains significant public support for the Uyghur cause. This public sentiment exerts political pressure on all the political parties involved.**
- f. Speakers are all in agreement that China should not be seen in an *either-or* perspective. This is supported by an example from Germany where they have a 'three-folds' view on China. Not only do they view China as a ***partner***, but at the same time, they regard China as a ***rival*** and ***competitor***.

## C. KEY TAKEAWAYS

### I. The rise of China in the Eyes of Other Countries (Germany, South Africa, Turkey)

From the African point of view, the Chinese presence has been productive for the continent. “The rise of China has been very complicated in South Africa. And so on the one hand, I think a lot of global South countries in South Africa, particularly, I think see the rise of China as an opportunity, not necessarily to join with China or to, you know, kind of or to align themselves with China, but more because China offers, partly China's role is as a kind of disruptor [to] the current global system....***But I think for the global South and for countries like South Africa, they also see a lot of opportunity in that disruption.***”

China has been built a huge build up of infrastructure throughout the continent. And in the process, it was really transformative in some African countries. And it also opened the door to a lot of other emerging powers. And in the process also highlighted what wasn't happening in Africa's relationship with Western power, you know, ***so there wasn't, for example, a lot of infrastructure building coming from from western power until China basically changed that landscape and then western power responded as we now seeing with with initiatives like the Global Gateway from Europe.***” Cobus van Staden

In Germany, China has been seen as a partner, competitor and rival, and Europe has some expectations as well for their role in the global stage. “And I'd say that the rise of China has an effect on Germany in at least three areas, for sure, on the economy, but also our international expectations towards China, and then also on security.

China's rise impacts us heavily. Our trade volume with China last year was 253 billion euros, which is an amount that almost doubled in the previous 10 years. And 10% of our goods go to China. So it's the biggest, second biggest export market after the US. So there are huge benefits for Germany when it comes to the rise of China, and for a long time Germany and China, their economies were complementary.

Now what we see in rather recent times is that we have become competitors. And if you look at strategic papers, and this is true for the EU as well as for German strategic papers on China, we look at China in a threefold manner. China is a partner, a competitor, and a systemic rival. And this is also why diversification and de-risking have become such big buzzwords in Berlin and also in Brussels.

On security issues, we also expect that China plays a crucial role when we look at current conflicts. Of course, first of all, from a European point of view, in Ukraine, China has, and Putin is at this very moment in Beijing, China has some channels to Russia, and in Germany, we have the expectation that it also uses these channels....But also when it comes to Gaza, Yemen, Sudan, so many, many places in the world where ***I think Germany has an increasing expectation of China also taking on more responsibility when it comes to its rise.***” Julia Ganter

Turkey sees China's rise as part of an effort for non-Western multipolarity, which Turkey supports. "So, Turkey has, let me say, mixed feelings towards China's rise. On the one hand, it welcomes this development as a sign of rising multipolarity in the world system, in terms of a less Western-centric world, and because it's a timely development for Turkey, which is trying to branch out from its traditionally Western-centric foreign policy.

However, in the last two decades or so, with the lessening effect of Cold War, rise of multi-polarity, and also diminishing hopes for EU membership, the Turkish governments have been trying to have a more multi-polar foreign policy, and the emphasis being on less western-centric and more Asia-focused.

In this sense, Turkey welcomes China as a rising power in the international system and is willing to cooperate with China, both in China's Belt and Road Initiative in its region, and also in other international engagements such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, for example. So there is that, ***but while Turkey welcomes any attempts for non-Western multipolarity in the international system, China is not necessarily the emerging power that Turkey would like to see on stage.***

And that's due to the historical legacy of the Uyghur issue. China's Uyghur minority in Xinjiang has historical linguistic, religious, ethnic ties with Turkey and also a historical link of migration and asylum after the 49 revolution, after the establishment of the PRC. So today, there's this duality within Turkey that the governments are committed to having constructive relationships with China, and the rise of China is seen as an economic and political power, increasingly political power. But there is a large base for public support for the Uyghur cause in Turkey, which becomes a political pressure on all the political parties concerned." **Dr. Ceren Ergenç**

## **II. The Rise of A New Power Typically Causes Disruption. – The Risk Associated with China's Rise**

"I think South Africa is a little similar to Turkey in the sense that it welcomes multi-polarity, I think, just as in and of itself kind of they welcome, more choices, greater diversity of powers, you know, and not being kind of locked into a kind of a unipolar situation.

But I think there are strong philosophical issues playing out in South Africa around whether the country should be aligning itself more with China and other Global South powers, even if there are some illiberal powers in there, or whether South Africa should stay with a Western and liberal perspective. In practice, it ends up being a little bit a mix of both, and it can sometimes be quite incoherent.

I think the additional risks are that I think people are also worried about how the global South is going to be impacted by traditional Western powers' reaction to the rise of China. So it's not only the rise of China itself, but it is how the rise of China is, what the rise of China is, what kind of knock-on effects are being caused in Washington and Europe, and how those will then translate and land on the global south.

And the BRI is playing an important role and they [Global South countries] want that role to be complimentary with the Global Gateway or with PGI or other other Western lead kind of infrastructure provision, you know, initiatives, They don't want the two to be in conflict and they don't want to be under pressure to choose one or the other or to be, for example, ripping out perfectly good Chinese internet networks because they're facing pressure from the United States And that, I think, is raising a lot of worries in the global south.” **Cobus van Staden**

“I would say that it's maybe too much to say that Germany welcomes multipolarity because there's always the risk of doubting how these emerging powers will kind of shift the current global order. However, if you listen closely to the German leadership, you will see that they, even if they might not welcome it, they for sure accept the fact that it's happening and that we have to embrace it.

When it comes to the risks associated with China, from a German perspective, I really have to go back to economic issues, because if you look at the de-risking strategies at the moment, they're really focused on several economic factors.

So I think the risk from a German perspective when it comes to China's rise is that we have these dependencies and that we kind of have the experience when it comes to Russia, especially that being very dependent on one country in a specific sector causes big, big problems. We have lived through this experience recently with the invasion of Ukraine when we try to become, when we try to decouple, and this is not something that people want to do with China, but in the case of Russia, we had to, when we tried to decouple very quickly from Russian oil and gas.

I would say that one issue that is also monitored is kind of a risk is China's interest to flex its muscle. Because we also, again, looking at Russia, we see that there might be situations where countries become ambitious and expansionist. So in Germany, people monitor closely what Xi Jinping says about Taiwan. And he said in the past that China must and will be reunited and reserves its right to use force. So this is a quote that I'm just citing here from Xi Jinping. And this kind of wording is closely monitored too in Germany when it comes to China's posture towards Taiwan.” **Julia Ganter**

### **III. Putting China & Russia in the Same 'Box'**

“And Russia, also China, sees itself as a global power where it sees Russia only as a regional power in Central Asia, not as its equal, right? And therefore, China's relationship with Russia is only pragmatic and interest-based. So there's no such thing as a full support for the Ukraine war, for example.

And when it comes to Turkey, it does not see China and Russia as the same block. I see, being based in Europe, being based in Brussels, I get a lot of requests or proposals about how to protect Turkey from the China-Russia access in quotation marks, right? But what I always say is that there's no China-Russia access when it comes to Turkey. Turkey has its own relationship with Russia as a regional power, and also its own relationship with China as

a global power, which is trying to, of course, get involved in regional matters both in Central Asia and the Middle East, but still they're not in the same basket for Turkey.” **Dr. Ceren Ergenc**

#### **IV. Seeing China in an *Either-Or* View**

“I was thinking maybe, are we not, like in a sense, do we always have to view the rise of China from a very ***either or*** perspective. Do we always have to view China, the rise of China as a threat? Or is it because of some other factors which I cannot definitely put a finger on because there's always, why do we always view, I mean, like even for instance, from what Cobus has said or Julia has said or Ceren has said, there's always this mixed feeling, right?”  
**Dr. Salikyu Sangtam**

“And I come back to the approach that, in the end, is actually most of the time criticized by Chinese interlocutors, that the European Union and also Germany have, seeing China as a partner, but also as a rival and a competitor. So it's actually threefold. It's not only a threat, so not only a rival. It's also a partner and a competitor. And I think what is the benefit of this approach is that it tries to catch the complexity of the relationship ... .So it's a complex, it's a more complex relationship, and it wouldn't be correct just to characterize China as a threat.”  
**Julia Ganter**

#### **V. Insecurity Caused by The Rise of China – Its Relations with the US.**

“From the South African perspective, some of the changes that China is proposing in the global order, for example, that China has been campaigning for a while around, you know, defining development, the right to development as a human right, for example, which, you know, kind of which the United States is opposed.

This kind of discussion about the kind of dismantling of a liberal order or the, you know, kind of anxieties about that being expressed in Western countries just play very differently in Africa, who has, you know, kind of like at the moment of like peak unipolar power, you know, among Western countries in the 90s and 2000s, Africa was at that moment undergoing structural adjustment programs, was undergoing like huge economic kind of impacts that were largely, you know, kind of coming from decisions that ended up being made in Western capitals.” **Cobus van Staden**

#### **VI. Response to ‘China is Free to Follow Its Own Path of Development**

The political rhetoric has two dimensions. One is creating a room for normative values other than Western liberal order of plurality, electoral democracy, and basic political human rights.

And these are all conditionalities of Western economic aid to the Global South, right? So these two are closely linked in the Western system, whereas China suggests: a.) Delinking political developments from economic aid and b.) A different set of political values, like replacing collective human rights, like right to shelter, right to food, right to education, with individual political rights, right to freedom of speech, freedom of association, and whatnot.

So to sum up, I think Turkey's response to the new kind of developments promoted by Xi Jinping and China is also varied domestically.” **Dr. Ceren Ergenc**