Across the Region

Asia-Europe forum discusses Iraq, N.K.
By Choi Soung-ah

BEIJING: Global security, as the world knew it, has forever been changed in the 21st century. With horrific events such as the Sept. 11 attacks in the United States, terrorism, threats of war and weapons of mass destruction, governments are constantly being forced to take defensive measures.

Security has become a major issue, especially in Asia and Europe, which share similar geopolitical traits. Now the two regions have joined hands to work out how to counter security threats by strengthening international cooperation.

Under the theme "New Security Challenges for Asia and Europe," the dialogue on security took place in Beijing from April 21 to 23, bringing together 60 of the most eminent scholars, researchers and policymakers from the 25 ASEM member countries.

The conference was developed by the organizers of the Asia Europe Meeting with the aim of fostering greater understanding between the two continents on the profound sociopolitical changes which have taken place in both regions since the 9/11 attacks.

"Due to globalization, Asians and Europeans are no longer facing only traditional security threats, but also unconventional ones," said Bertrand Fort, ASEF director of Intellectual Exchange. "This is a growing trend that needs to be addressed, notably through better dialogue on security between the two regions."

One of the main issues at hand was the role of ASEM in enhancing cooperation on security in the two regions, calling for a multidimensional dialogue between Asia and Europe.

Conventional security is referred to in the issues of so-called high politics, such as national defense, terrorist disputes, sovereignty and inter-states military posture, according to Prof. Xu Jian, vice-president of the China Institute of International Studies.

Unconventional security refers to issues of so-called low-politics, including economic security, terrorism, environmental pollution, population explosion, drug trafficking and transnational crimes.

"The proliferation of WMD is now a factor worth special attention in this regard. It used to be a typical conventional issue. Related to international terrorism, however, this issue now has also become a grave problem in the unconventional security field," Xu said.

"It is imperative to prevent WMD from falling into the hands of terrorists. It is also important to ensure that norms and principles governing international relations be maintained and respected in dealing with the proliferation of WMD."

Various security issues on the agenda at the three-day forum highlighted the current situations in Iraq and North Korea.

Prof. Lee Seo-hang, of South Korea's Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security, said Northeast-Asia's geopolitical elements make it a region where the security environment is the most complicated in the world.

But with many significant multilateral efforts emerging in the past decade, the current status of Northeast Asian regional security arrangements have improved, he said.

These include the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization or KEDO, the informal summit meeting among Korea, China and Japan in ASEAN plus three, the trilateral coordination among the United States, South Korea and Japan on North Korea issues, and the six-party talks to resolve Pyongyang's nuclear standoff.

"We envisage that in the months ahead the six-party talks, the working group meeting and bilateral consultations and contacts within the framework of the six-way talks, will go a long way toward
overcoming mutual distrust and to building confidence," said Lee.

The participating members unanimously agreed multilateralism was the key in resolving global security threats and reiterated that cooperation was the only way to enhance security in Asia and Europe.

The Asia-Europe Foundation, along with the China Institute of International Studies, co-organized the three-day conference with the support of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the European Aeronautic Defense and Space Company.

ASEF was created in 1997 by the heads of state of the Asia Europe Meeting, including 10 Asian nations, as well as the 15 member states of the European Union, to promote better mutual understanding between Asia and Europe. Three of its core programs cover intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges. -- The Korea Herald

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