

Report of the Workgroup

“The Great Debators”

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Introduction

“Every human being is a political animal”. This quote cultivated by Aristotle many years ago remains true to this very day because every single person seeks to acquire power of some sort. We are the Great Debators and our topic to discuss was politics. Politics is the study of power variables, power institutions, and power relationships in society. Within our work group we discussed politics all around the world and even related them back to our home countries. We took the time to research the topics, analyze them, and critique them. We formulated our own opinion on each topic while adequately accepting others opinion. The topics we discussed are described in the content in this paper.

Summaries of the most important discussions

Conflict India-Pakistan

November 26, 2008 – Mumbai was under siege by terrorists and it has been widely believed since then that the plans were all hatched in Pakistan. Since then, the political equations between India and Pakistan haven't been too very cordial. This initiated a series of mails on the Workgroup about the history of India-Pakistan conflicts. We discussed about the long history of wars between the two countries starting from way back in 1947 through the middle years of 1965, 1971 and the last one in 1999. Kashmir was and still continues to remain the bone of contention between the two countries. The fact that both the countries are nuclear powers also made us explore the various implications that a war in this region would have on South Asia. The perspectives of religion playing a role in the divisive politics between the two countries also gave us a deeper insight into the history of conflicts between the two countries. The discussion also extended to terrorism and its connection with the two countries. The more recent example of the Mumbai terror attacks and the cold response given by Pakistan to the claims by the Indian government and the reasons for that also figured in our discussions.

Financial Crisis

The financial crisis is a major political topic those days and has not spared any part of the world. Although three of the MF countries: Germany, China and India are so far not as badly affected as the U.S., the governments have taken some actions to avoid the situation getting worst.

Germany: The government has released an 'economic stimulus package', including supporting the car industry and banks, tax reduction and so on. Economic growth is expected to be about minus 4 percent this year, with unemployment raised from 7% to about 9%.

China: Thousands of factories and trade companies went bankrupt. As a result, unemployed rate hits new high. The government has released an Rmb4, 000bn (\$585bn) fiscal package, according which money will be invested in infrastructure, education and health system. GDP growth is expected to be around 8% in 2009.

India: Students are facing a difficult time as the job market cools down due to the decreasing needs of outsourcing. GDP growth is stagnating around 7-8%.

Group members think that the crisis is going to last for a while and it might change the world politics to some extent.

Capitalism – post capitalism?

This topic rose up from an article in “Le Monde” which put in doubt survival of capitalist system due to the economical crisis. Therefore, the initial question was: is there other economic system/form of society that can better cope with the actual development? The answers were diverse. Mainly, we described the economical systems that are part of our society, how the public and private ownership work in our societies, why should be one or the other a better administrator of people’s needs such as: health, education, weapons, etc. Plus, even though our economical systems have socialism and communism as title or something similar, it doesn’t actually work that way. We all recognized some form of capitalism working in our society. One have public and private ownership quite balanced (Germany), others privileged public ownership (India and China) and some of them have an extended private one (Chile).

Later on, our concerns about private decisions in public services turned our discussion to explain to each other how health care system worked in our countries. We realized that the situation was similar in India, China and Chile. The medical internships accomplish similar functions at the beginning of medical career. Interns have to work during a certain period of time in rural areas to cover the need because very few doctors want to work in those regions.

The need and increasing wealth inequality become obvious in this conversation. Chile, India and even Germany have increased the difference between rich and poor people despite their wealth or popular economies in today’s world.

Election of Barack Obama

Some citizens have waited their whole lives for the moment to arrive when a “Black”/African American man would be elected to the position of president of the United States of America. November 4, 2008 the wait was over because Barack Obama was elected for the position. January 20, 2009 president elect Barack Obama was inaugurated. One of the topics that we discussed was the inauguration of the first “Black”/African American President of the United States of America. This particular discussion showed the unity of human beings. We were all very impressed with his speech. What shocked us were the critical critiques given concerning George W. Bush and the severity in Obama’s voice surrounded by seriousness of his tone. It was the first time that many of us had taken the time to watch the inauguration in general. More importantly, we felt that Barack Obama is ready to stand up and make a change. In the words of Jaikar “the fact that he acknowledges the force of challenges in front of him would make him a much better administrator”. The wait is over and the time has finally arrived.

Immigration

Reflecting on our discussion about immigration I want to start saying that we covered many different aspects, we shared articles, we talked about books and we shared experiences. We talked about the economic and political aspect, but we also tried to talk about the psychological side. What is like to be an immigrant? We, as MF fellows know how it is like to be a stranger in a foreign country. That is why we also reflected on our own feelings and how we felt.

We started the discussion about immigration discussing the EU immigration policy. WE discussed that the "wealth gap" between the EU in the south and the neighboring African countries is huge. Regularly, poor Africans try to reach one of the Italian, Greek or Spanish islands in the mediterranean sea, hoping that once they arrived there, they will have a better life. However, the reality is often different: They are put in crowded camps for illegal immigrants, often sent back to their home countries and if they get asylum (only a small minority does) they have hard times ahead, too. The answer of the EU to the situation is to increase border control, allow people to ask for asylum to the EU before crossing the mediterranean sea (and then almost always refuse it) and asking the African neighbors to secure their borders. The consequences are that thousands try to cross the sea with old and small ships, that often sink. Then Jiahui said when she read the book 'the world is flat', she wondered about how flat will the world really be? "Will it be an even world in the future, where every single part of the globe is alike? I believe it's natural and necessary that people upgrade their conditions of living by moving to richer areas and better developed countries. I believe the issue is not immigration or not, but how to deal with immigrants..."

On the other hand we pointed out that when the illegal immigrants enter their destination, they get no ID, no room to live and always out of work. All they must do is to hide to prevent to be arrested. In this situation, no one can predict what they are going to do. I totally understand they are in danger and difficulty but allowing them to stay in the host countries without control is unfair to the taxpayers of the host countries. We also integrated our own opinion into the discussion. Li Li told us for example that when he travelled in southern Italy in 2007 where there are lots of illegal immigrants, a wallet got stolen by Gypsy and the native told us "it's lucky that they didn't take all the money".

We drew the conclusion that improving the economy is one sure way of eliminating or at least trying to limit the problem of immigrants. What we did not discuss is that immigrants are also enriching for the society. We found out that a basic question is, if we have any right to have exclusive access to the resources of a country, only because we (by chance) were born within some artificially defined borderlines. If so, then it is destiny if we have to suffer in a poor warzone or live in a wealthy state without any dangers. If not, then it becomes very difficult to argue for the limitation of migration.

We also discussed the us American policy on immigration. We got to know that a lot of countries are trying to close the borders these days because the U.S, is trying to do the same thing. Actually we learned via our discussions how the immigration policy looks like in our MF countries.

We gave the discussion another direction by talking about giving the topic another direction now. Sorry about should the immigrants coming to your country learn your country's culture, the language

etc. Or would it be rather preferable to let the immigrants lead their own way of life as that leads to a cosmopolitan culture which in itself is also very unique!

Our conclusion of the discussion is that there is a responsibility on both sides: Immigrants should try to really integrate in their host country. This means learning the language, sending the kids to school, accept the culture and religious/political system, try to take part in daily life. And, in the end, try to find a job. The states where the immigrants go to should on the one hand ask for the will to integrate. But they should also make it as easy as possible for immigrants to do so. This might mean offering language classes.

Conclusion

Being member of this very special work group meant a lot to each of us. The Great Debaters were special in several ways. On the one hand we all felt a team spirit that encouraged us to have very deep and reflective discussions. On the other hand we all liked our topic so much, that we came up with various different ideas. What we also consider as being unique is that we were all very active. This was the most active work group that I have ever been part of. What is also special about the Great Debaters is that we can really be satisfied with our performance. As we were only a few members every single fellow was essential and if someone was absent for some time we just needed to wait for an explanation or for the next mail. The work group became a place to discuss political topics and a place of learning. We learned from each other and with each other.

We discussed all the topics presented and even more. The summaries that we share with you are only a selection of the diverse topics that we discussed.

As it was a real pleasure for us being in this work group, we want the “Great Debaters” to stay a forum of vivid discussion and deep reflection. That is why we want to continue to use this channel even in the future.