Report following ADI-supported travels to Japan and South Korea 12-17 December 2010 regarding research project on ‘Security Multilateralism in Northeast Asia’.

Following the Asian Dynamics Initiative (ADI) conference in Copenhagen in mid-November 2010, where I presented a paper titled “How to ensure long-term regional stability? – the perspectives of developing a multilateral security mechanism in Northeast Asia that includes North Korea”, I started a research project exploring the issue of ‘Security Multilateralism in Northeast Asia’. The question of whether - and how - to develop a multilateral security mechanism in Northeast Asia is intensively discussed in the region among researchers working on International Relations and Asian Security. From my stay at School of International Studies (SIS), Peking University, I had discussed this issue several times with Chinese researchers gaining insights into Chinese views and ideas on the future perspectives for security multilateralism in Northeast Asia. The interesting issue then was to investigate if these Chinese views and ideas were shared in Japan and South Korea. China, Japan and South Korea will, together with the U.S., be the main participants in any multilateral security mechanism in Northeast Asia, and are currently participating, together with Russia and North Korea, in the ongoing Six Party Talks focused on handling the North Korean nuclear weapons program. The Six Party Talks are still widely regarded as the best foundation on which to develop a Northeast Asian multilateral security mechanism.

The ADI-supported travels to Tokyo (12-15 December) and Seoul (15-17 December) were highly rewarding for my research and research networking in the region. In Tokyo, I had meetings with both Japanese researchers (at the National Institute for Defence Studies), and Japanese diplomats (in the Policy Planning Division and in the Security Policy Division at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan), and I also met with U.S. diplomats at the American Embassy in Tokyo getting good insights into the U.S. approach and policy towards security multilateralism in Northeast Asia. In Seoul, I met with South Korean researchers (at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and National Security) and I also had the opportunity to go to the demilitarised zone and participate in a briefing by the U.S. military stationed there. All in all, I gained unique insights into the debates in Japan and South Korea on future perspectives for security multilateralism in Northeast Asia and thus a better foundation on which to identify and further discuss common and diverse interests and concerns among the Northeast Asian states in relation to the development of a multilateral security mechanism in the region. Building on the ADI-conference paper and these insights, I am currently working on an article titled “Multilateral security cooperation in Northeast Asia. Any alternatives to the Six Party Talks?” hopefully to be published in a pre-reviewed journal in the near future.

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