

Recap G20 Bali Summit A Glimpse of Hope?

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 Shada Islam, Sofie Syarief

Mid November 2022, the Group of Twenty (G20) held their 17th meeting in Bali, Indonesia. EU-ASEAN relations developed into a strategic partnership in December 2020, and trade and investments between the two regions are booming. “Indo-Pacific” is the current geopolitical buzzword for trade, connectivity and maritime security.

Despite the long-existing underestimation of ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific by the Global North and its mainstream media, the recent leaders’ meetings in the Indo-Pacific region are providing an outlook of a new multipolar world to come. We were joined by experts Shada Islam and Sofie Syarief in the fourth session of Asia Talks this season.

Shada Islam, Brussels-based specialist on EU-Asia affairs and founder of the New Horizons Project (NHP), noted that the G20 2022 provided a glimmer of hope and an outline of what the world could look like when we move away from the toxic, great-power competition. She suggests that the G20 format is a well-suited format to deal with some of the global governance challenges we face today.

Looking at the geopolitical landscapes today, we are facing a perilous world not only because of the war in Ukraine but because the

pandemic has slowed the economy down and we anticipate a winter of discontent all over the world. Whether it be in terms of ideas or power structures, we are living in a world of rapid change and it brings friction; powers of the past are finding themselves dealing with an assertive, self-confident Global South. Issues of diversity and inclusion are becoming important not only in our personal lives but also in geopolitics. Questions of colonialism and decolonisation are coming into our conversations. Dealing with inequalities - gender, power, racial - are very much on the agenda. It is no longer a world of the dominant west and the marginal others, but a multi-polar world including soft power, smart power, and digital power. The Global South now has agency and confidence to push for their own concerns and interests, seen for example in the Russian war in Ukraine. Not all of them have chosen to align with the US and European stance on Russia.

The reason why there was a conciliatory tone at the Bali G20 summit was because Joko Widodo, through his patient, modest, persistent diplomacy, Shada Islam points out, managed to bring the tempers down and engineered between Xi Jinping and Joe Biden very well. They talked about responsible

competition, not reckless confrontation, and on not sliding into a new cold war. The EU and ASEAN, among others, have long said that they do not want to be held between a binary choice between the US and China. Islam says that the lesson for the so-called Global North to learn is that it is not about who shouts loudest and criticizes, but to be able to work behind the scenes. The Americans and Europeans were ready for a clash and to walk out if Putin was present, but that situation was avoided thanks to Indonesia's moderate diplomacy.

G20 was significant for taking place in the Indo-Pacific, however Shada Islam and Sofie Syarief agree that there needs to be a further significant change in the relationship between the Global South and the Global North. Respect is crucial, and very few people in the EU actually understand the importance of what is happening in Asia.

The EU needs to brush up its game in the region in terms of connectivity, partnership and trade. Islam hopes that at the EU-ASEAN summit in 2022, commemorating their 45-year relationship, the two parties will lay out the groundwork for EU-ASEAN free trade agreement by starting the discussions on partnerships on digital, and green renewable energy.

Sofie Syarief, television journalist and independent researcher based in Indonesia and London, agrees that the G20 was an overall success despite the geopolitical crisis looming over. However, Syarief also shared her concerns on the Indonesian government's stance of not taking a side - Indonesia should show a substantial stance on foreign policy,

such as in the instance of Myanmar, as an ASEAN member. This stance roots from a base that the majority of Indonesians consider foreign policy merely as a means to achieve domestic interests, an inward thinking of Indonesians that is reflected by the government, Syarief points out. There were also many attempts to curtail protests during this time.

The power between the Global North and the Global South needs to become more balanced, especially taking into account that the Global South will be the first ones receiving harm from issues like climate change. The topic of climate change should have been more present at the G20, but it will take more meetings. Widodo, during his 8 years of presidency never once attended the UNGA - some might say it is useless, but it is a global framework to put out ideas of foreign policies that could put Indonesia on a global map. Indonesia is currently well-positioned to speak up on problems, as it has the voice to be listened to but does not have too much to lose from condemning countries for their wrongdoings. Syarief wants to see clever diplomacy happen and now is the time for Widodo to take more risks in his remaining year and a half as president. Syarief notes that this will serve him well, allowing him to prolong his political life by putting his name on the map that will remain after his presidency is over, and leaving behind Indonesia's new foreign policy stance as one of his legacies.

On an ending note to the session, Islam and Syarief touched on their take in feminist foreign policy. Both expressed their concerns

of what is being performed as “feminist” foreign policy. What is truly required is inclusive geopolitics based on the understanding of intersectionality. Even with more women on the table, which tends to be dominated by white women, the table itself is patriarchal. Feminist geopolitics and foreign policy should be about changing the root causes of conflicts, understanding them, working behind and in front of the scenes, working to prevent wars, bringing women into peace negotiations and giving them the voice and power to actually speak up and make changes.

 Relevant Links:

Shada Islam

<https://www.shadaislam.com/>

Sofie Syarief (Twitter)

<https://twitter.com/sofiesyarief>

“The G20 in Bali, ASEAN, and the forgotten art of EU diplomacy”

- Shada Islam

<https://euobserver.com/opinion/156448>

