

## Executive Summary

*Triangle Agenda Conference, March 23-24, 1998, Munich, Germany*  
*An Intercontinental Look at the Future*

Twenty-five forward-looking thinkers convened in at the Center for Applied Policy Research (CAP) in Munich to consider the question of how we want to live tomorrow in an interdisciplinary and intercultural fashion. Specifically, the conference discussed

- 1) possible keys to interpreting the social and political directions of our future societies;
- 2) attitudes toward the future in America, Europe, and Asia; and
- 3) the values and norms that will continue to serve as the foundations for our societies well into the twenty-first century.

Four panels of three experts each presented their views on topics put forward by the CAP:

- Future Societies in Europe, the US, and Asia;
- Attitudes and Expectations for the future of Europe, the US, and Asia;
- Values and Ethics in Europe, the US, and Asia; and
- Future Trends and Challenges.

The Anglo-German sociologist Ralf Dahrendorf points out three fundamental expectations of people in modern industrialized societies: economic prosperity, political freedom, and social cohesion. Broadly speaking, each of the three regions represented at our conference emphasizes different combinations of these expectations. In the United States, political freedom and economic prosperity come before social cohesion, while in Europe political freedom and social cohesion are more highly valued than economic competitiveness. The countries of East and Southeast Asia have stressed economic competition and social cohesion, to the detriment of political freedom.

The approaches of our speakers continually reflected these emphases: Americans tended to talk about freedom, whether political or economic, and usually both. Europeans tended to discuss culture in the sense of communication among different groups, or as a continuity separate from the marketplace. They also gave the conference important reminders that societies take longer to change than businesses or economies. Among our Asian presenters, there was a strong emphasis on economic development, rising standards of living, and the effects of these trends. They tended to assume that social cohesion within a given country would persist and focus on the economic aspects of the future.

Based on these existing norms, attitudes toward the future varied more within a given region than among the regions. In each area, many members of the population fear change - particularly globalizing change - as a concept, regardless of the actual impact it has had on their lives. Another sizable segment does not particularly welcome change, but recognizes the need to adapt. A smaller segment reacts to a changing world by fleeing into special interests and subcultures. Finally, a relatively small but growing segment actively welcomes globalizing change and works to take personal advantage of changing circumstances. How political and social conditions would

adapt to these groupings was not yet clear, and the discussants posed provocative questions in this direction.

Key questions for interpreting the future social and political directions of society will provide the Research Group on the Global Future part of its working agenda. From the conference, these include how globalization affects the balance among national, state or regional, and supra-national political arrangements; how key technologies, such as genetic engineering or computer networks, affect social organization; how increasing economic development and individualization will impact societies in Asia, and how that impact will affect world politics; how much concentrated technical, economic, and political change our existing structures can stand; and what bases new social, business and political relations will rest on.

Our web site contains much more material on the Trilateral Agenda Conference, including:

- Detailed Program of the Proceedings
- Quick Reference List of Participants
- Biographies of Presenters
- Presentation Abstracts with Links to Summaries
- Additional Data