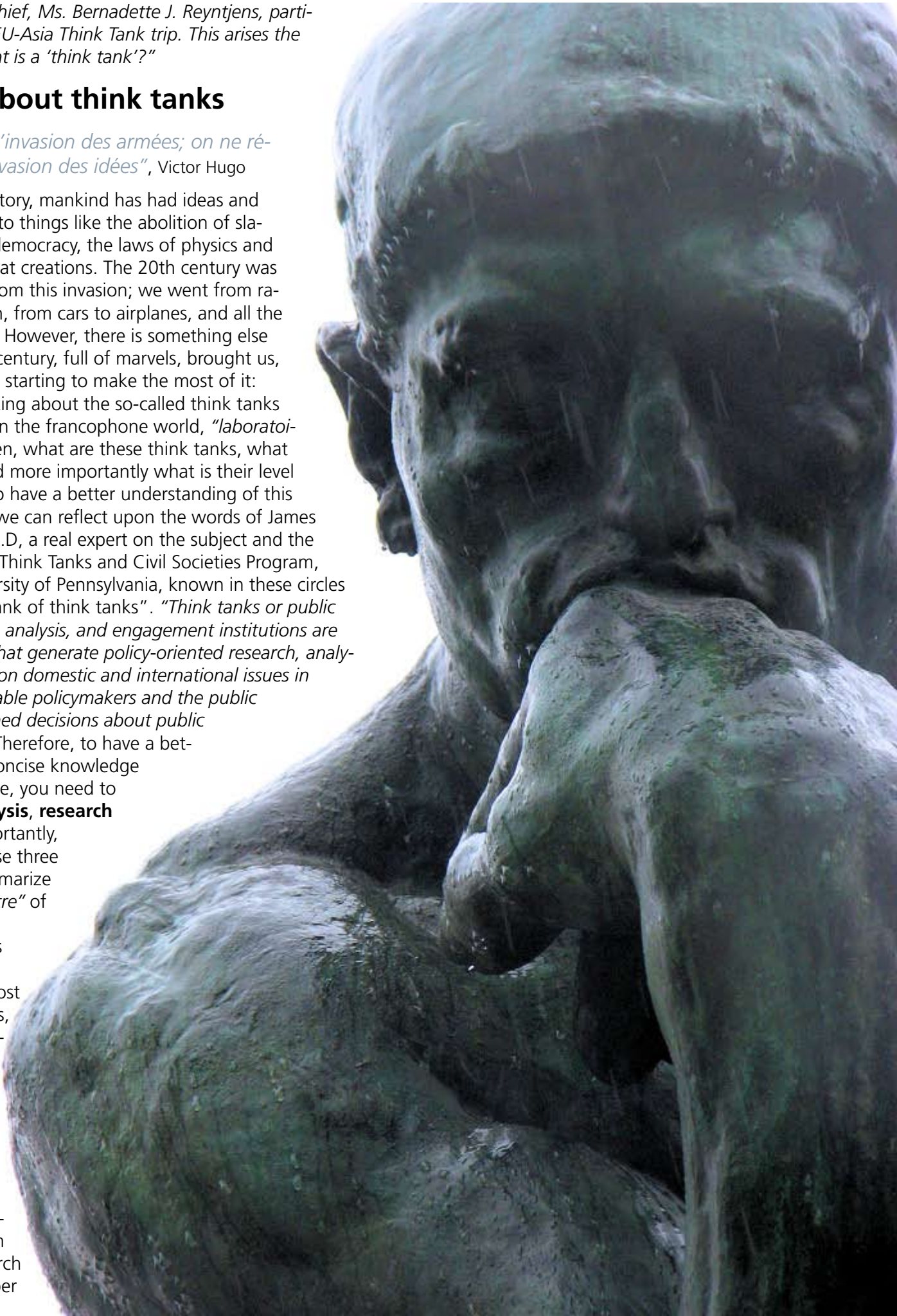


Our Editor-in-Chief, Ms. Bernadette J. Reyntjens, participated in the EU-Asia Think Tank trip. This arises the question: “What is a ‘think tank’?”

Talking about think tanks

“On résiste à l’invasion des armées; on ne résiste pas à l’invasion des idées”, Victor Hugo

Throughout history, mankind has had ideas and turned them into things like the abolition of slavery, calculus, democracy, the laws of physics and many other great creations. The 20th century was no exception from this invasion; we went from radio to television, from cars to airplanes, and all the way to rockets. However, there is something else that this same century, full of marvels, brought us, and we are just starting to make the most of it: yes, we are talking about the so-called think tanks or, as they say in the francophone world, “laboratoire d’idées”. Then, what are these think tanks, what do they do, and more importantly what is their level of influence? To have a better understanding of this phenomenon, we can reflect upon the words of James G. McGann, Ph.D, a real expert on the subject and the Director of the Think Tanks and Civil Societies Program, from the University of Pennsylvania, known in these circles as the “think tank of think tanks”. “Think tanks or public policy research, analysis, and engagement institutions are organizations that generate policy-oriented research, analysis, and advice on domestic and international issues in an effort to enable policymakers and the public to make informed decisions about public policy issues”. Therefore, to have a better and more concise knowledge of what they are, you need to stick with **analysis, research** and, most importantly, **influence**; these three words can summarize the “raison d’être” of a think tank. And who forms part of these institutions? Most of the members, experts and collaborators are scholars, analysts, former and/or future high ranking officials who dedicate their time and know-how to perform extensive research on a vast number



of subjects, followed by accurate recommendations. Moving on to the typology of think tanks, we need to delve into the different categories into which they are divided. Continuing with James G. McGann, in his article from 2002 *Think Tanks and the Transnationalization of Foreign Policy* defined their distribution as follows:

- Political Party Affiliated - Konrad Adenauer Foundation (Germany, est. 1964), Jaures Foundation (France, 1990), and Progressive Policy Institute (U.S., 1998).
- Government Affiliated - China Development Institute (PRC, 1989), Institute for Political & International Studies (Iran, 1984), and Congressional Research Service (U.S., 1914).
- Quasi-Governmental - Funded exclusively by government grants and contracts, but not a part of the formal structure of government. Examples include: Institute for Strategic & International Studies (Malaysia, 1983), Korean Development Institute (Korea, 1971), and Woodrow International Center for Scholars (U.S., 1968).
- Autonomous &/or Independent - Significant independence from any one interest group or donor and autonomous in its operation and funding from government. Examples include: Pakistan Institute of International Affairs (Pakistan, 1947), Institute for Security Studies (South Africa, 1990), and Institute for International Economics (U.S., 1981)
- Quasi-Independent - Autonomous from government but controlled by an interest group, donor or contracting agency that provides a majority of the funding and has significant influence over the think tank’s operations. Examples include European Trade Union Institute (Belgium, 1978), NLI Research Institute (Japan, 1988), and Center for Defense Information (U.S., 1990).
- University Affiliated - Examples include Foreign Policy Institute, Hacettepe University (Turkey, 1974), Institute for International Relations (Brazil, 1979), The Carter Center, Emory University (U.S., 1982) and the Hoover Institution, Stanford University (1918).

Even when their influence and presence is most likely to be found in the western hemisphere, think tanks have been spreading and having a snowball effect all around the world and becoming a reliable source for solutions. According to the latest report of the 2011 *Global Go To Think Tanks Index Report*, there are 6545 think tanks around the world, with North America on the top of the list with 1912 think tanks, closely followed by Europe with 1795.

Region	No. of TT's	% of Total
Africa	550	8.4
Asia	1198	18
Europe	1795	27
Latin American and the Caribbean	722	11
Middle East and North Africa	329	5
North America	1912	30
Oceania	39	6
Total	6545	100

The above chart reflects the number of think tanks in 2011 based on data collected as of July 24, 2011.

But how influential are these think tanks? What is their real level of influence in critical decision making? If we take, for example, the United States, where think tanks enjoy from a long history of power and leverage over decision makers, we can find the *Letter to President Clinton* in 1998 from the **Project for the New American Century**, which addressed US foreign policy in the Middle East and how their position towards Saddam Hussein should be more aggressive in order to tackle any possibility for the Iraqi regime to acquire weapons of mass destruction. Five years later this letter could be conceived as the corner stone for the Bush Administration development of *Operation Iraqi Freedom*. On the European level, we find how one of the most prominent think tanks in the United Kingdom, the **Chatham House** was responsible for the reforms in environmental policies for the European Union and the People’s Republic of China under their 2007 report *Interdependencies on Energy and Climate Security for China and Europe*. Making their recommendations be heard is not an easy task. Think tanks are constantly holding conferences and meetings,



Chatam House (CH), Royal Institute of International Affairs - United Kingdom

publishing papers and reports, and more importantly, bringing the discussion to the table and creating the debate. It is important to note that in this fast growing and globalized world, where policymakers and decision makers are in constant demand of up-to-date solution to everyday problems, public policy research intuition come in handy by providing first-class solution to topics varying from foreign policy to environmental issues. This is why their role and influence will continue to rise, together with their number, budget, size and their areas of expertise. Modern think tanks will continue to shape the future in public policy research, and the invasion of ideas will be irresistible.

Top Ten Think Tanks (US and Non US)
1. Brookings Institution - United States
2. Chatham House (CH), Royal Institute of International Affairs - United Kingdom
3. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace - United States
4. Council on Foreign Relations (CFR) - United States
5. Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) - United States
6. RAND Corporation - United States
7. Amnesty International - United Kingdom
8. Transparency International - Germany
9. International Crisis Group (ICG) - Belgium
10. Peterson Institute for International Economics - United States

Source: THE GLOBAL GO TO THINK TANKS REPORT 2011