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stars Switzerland symposium 2016 in Stein am Rhein: a short review

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We are living in a world of highly unpredictable developments, reaching from the nuclear ambitions of North Korea to the intractable wars in the Middle East; from Sino-Japanese tensions to the expansion of Chinese influence in the South China Sea; from the refugee crises in Europe and in its neighborhood to geopolitical shifts in Eurasia; from a revival of protectionism to major central banks charting totally new paths in their monetary policy. Looking into the future nothing can be more accurate than the slogan of stars “expect the unexpected!”.

In such difficult times competent leadership is more important than anything else - competent leadership in politics, in the economy, in science and in civil society. It is, however, an unfortunate coincidence that exactly, when problems and challenges in a number of areas have become more complex and intractable than ever, the world lacks credible, decisive leadership. The current competition for the White House is symptomatic for the sad state of affairs.

When times get tough, when uncertainties prevail it is more important than ever that leaders have a broad view of things, can see beyond immediate, industry specific developments. The wider the knowledge and experience, the better one can deal with the challenges one faces in one’s professional life. This is all the more so as the world is currently not only witnessing much political and economic turmoil, but is also at the cusp of a new age in technology and science.

Every age, every generation of course believes to be unique. However, there are determined moments in human history, when changes gain speed and a new age is born. This was the case during the renaissance and the age of enlightenment, as it is today the case with the digital age. At these points of time it is particularly important to have leaders that have a cosmopolitan, open mindset. Remember the ideal of the renaissance man as a person who spans a wide spectrum of knowledge, from philosophy to state craft, from science to literature. Today, once again we are in need of such personalities.

stars symposia try to contribute to a comprehensive understanding of current and future trends in the world at large. In this year’s symposium in Stein am Rhein particular attention was given to a diverse set of topics from artificial intelligence to geopolitics; from genome science to the digital revolution; from global leadership to the rise of Africa. The lectures, debates and workshops provided an open platform to help deal with these issues. The compact framework of the stars symposia, once again, proved to be particularly useful for in-depth exchanges.

One of the important assets of stars is the alumni network. After the three stars events that were held in 2016, in Singapore, Chengdu and Stein am Rhein this network has been further expanded. It can and should be used as a platform of exchange beyond the symposia. "Reframing the future" was the subject of the 2016 symposium in Stein am Rhein. In today's world of increasing uncertainty and complexity this is a particularly ambitious goal.

Without any doubt, the coming four years will present the world with huge challenges. The United States will have a new president, China will have to ensure stability at the top of its leadership with the 19th National Congress of the Communist Party of China setting the course not only for the second term of office of President Xi Jinping but also making far-reaching decision about the next generation of leaders. Such periods of change always provide both opportunities and risks. One thing is certain: we will have to deal with a lot of uncertainty and it will be important to remain vigilant and flexible at the same time to master the ever changing situation.

With its symposia in Singapore and Chengdu stars is well-positioned in Asia. As the evolution of the Sino-American relations will be of crucial importance for the development of the world economy, this strong presence in Asia is a particularly valuable asset. Nobody doubts that China will continue to be the pre-eminent power in Asia and the only credible challenger to US supremacy in the Asia Pacific region. Furthermore, South East Asia and in particular Indonesia will profit from the geopolitical drivers of economic growth, most notably from a substantial increase in investment from Japan, the US and India. Singapore is the prime location from where these important developments can be observed and understood. With the 2017 stars symposium in Singapore and the study tour to Indonesia immediately prior to it, stars is well positioned to provide exclusive insights into a region that harbors over 600 million people with a total GDP of over 2,2 trillion US-\$.

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