

MIKTA

AN INNOVATIVE PARTNERSHIP



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MIKTA is a five-country cross-regional consultative and coordination platform that emerged on the margins of UN General Assembly in New York on September 25, 2013. It's grouping Mexico, Indonesia, Korea, Turkey and Australia, every single of them are rising and resilient open economies with strong open domestic markets and demographic structure, as well as large democracies.

Since its inception, MIKTA has been advertising itself as a „New Innovative Partnership” based on its diverse composition: it encompasses different civilizations, religions, economies and geographies. This may be considered both as a strength and weakness but definitely grants the informal grouping leverage and a certain authority on the international stage.

MIKTA is much less known than G7 or BRICS and it may be construed as a response to both of them. All of the members participate in the G20 forum, four in OECD,¹ two (Australia and Mexico) - in the newly formed CPTPP². The G20 summits have always been an important venue for MIKTA, where its participants vowed to „play a constructive role” to „further enhance MIKTA’s contribution to achieving inclusive and sustainable economic growth”.³ Recently, however, it seems that more and more its interests are moving towards United Nations as a more universal platform.

Force for good

MIKTA „counts among its members the 12th-, 14th-, 15th-, 16th- and 17th-largest economies in the world”.⁴ Its members refer to their grouping as „a force for good in promoting the delivery of global public goods”,⁵ as they „share universal values such as democracy and human rights” and „have a significant level of economic power”. MIKTA is also well-suited for bridging the divide between developing and developed countries („North – South”) as it’s made up of both of them.

¹ The notable exception in this respect is Indonesia.

² Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP): Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

³ 8 MIKTA Foreign Ministers Meeting Joint Communiqué, November 25, 2016
<https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/mikta-fm-joint-communication.aspx>

⁴ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=2998846>

⁵ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3004508>

Quite uniquely - and unlike the G7 and the BRICS – MIKTA has among its members two large, respected Muslim-majority countries: Indonesia and Turkey, filling the obvious vacuum and potentially making it a more capable and convincing global actor and broker. Furthermore, MIKTA’s strength lies in the strategic locations of its participants on four continents although it may also be a liability taking into account permanent instability of the Middle East and South Korea’s unpredictable, nuclear neighbour to the north.⁶ It’s also striking that almost all MIKTA countries are Pacific nations with a notable exception being Turkey that also stands out as a country uniquely situated between the Middle East and Europe – not fully integrated in either of them but balancing in the midst of both. Mexico – on the other hand – as a North American country has been always ‘contained’ by the superpower – the USA with which it shares the NAFTA membership, and – as a Latin American country – challenged by the rise of Brazil.

Interestingly, for both MIKTA offers a kind of ‘springboard’ from which they can gain added impetus they definitely need to build their international standing. Indonesia with its remarkable record of facilitating the birth and development of *Non-Aligned* Movement and ASEAN’s membership enjoys a very special position with which it can contribute to MIKTA’s future position in the world of emerging economies in Asia and Africa. On the other hand, MIKTA can provide Indonesia - with the tools necessary to boost its national interests and global connectivity without demanding onerous

⁶ <http://www.mikta.org/about/vision.php>

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commitments.⁷ South Korea is a ‘middle power’ as well as a ‘developed’ donor country but politically it is ‘squeezed’ between such giants as China, Russia, Japan and the USA which guarantees its security from a nuclear nightmare. It comes as no surprise that the very idea of the formation of MIKTA is credited to Seoul.⁸

Informal nature

MIKTA shapes its identity on the informal nature of the network and – so far – its highest, ‘decision-making’ body remains the foreign ministers’ summit. The MIKTAs seem to be happy with its construction and are reluctant to change it. This attitude is especially visible on the side of Mexico and Indonesia. In fact, it’s a convenient and highly pragmatic solution due to the group’s immense diversity in terms of culture, economy and geography. This kind of ‘partnership’ enables flexibility and actually makes it a more ‘democratic’ and ‘innovative’ platform for valuable consultation and cooperation in critical issues of common interest e.g. North Korean nuclear threat,

terrorism, migration or sustainable development – all of which have been top on MIKTA’s agenda.

Still, there is a chance that MIKTA’s very nature converts into just another ‘talking shop’ producing solemn statements without any actual follow up in the real life. This was the fate of such strongly formalized organizations as the League of Arab States. To some extent, MIKTA’s diversity determines its activity in this way that makes it ‘universal’ and ‘vague’ alike.

MIKTA countries are not willing to focus extensively on their respective internal governance or other issues. It may constitute a deficit for some, but it also paradoxically increases the efficiency of this group. It can still operate as an informal consultation and model forum on various subjects.

Foreign policy vehicle?

In the „Vision Statement”, adopted at the fifth Foreign Ministers’ meeting in Seoul in 2015, the network see themselves as „an agenda-setter on the global stage” that should be able to „build norms, share best practices and forge collective responses in a manner agreeable to all MIKTA mem-

⁷ <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/10/24/mikta-what-does-it-want.html>

⁸ <https://www.e-ir.info/2015/12/09/review-mikta-middle-powers-and-new-dynamics-of-global-governance/>

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bers.”⁹ Generally, there is impression that MIKTA is a foreign policy vehicle more than anything else. Consecutively, it has become a platform for promoting either highly general or specifically national interests of its members. Nevertheless, their joint statements or positions have good chances to be noticed and heard. MIKTA is driven by big ambitions: it wants to be a constructive force in areas such as good governance and democracy, sustainable development, climate change, counter terrorism, non-proliferation and global security. MIKTA also expressed its interest in reforming international financial institutions as well as international energy governance¹⁰ and global governance as such.¹¹

Within the G20, MIKTA has always declared its resistance to protectionism and support to an „innovative, open and inclusive world economy” as well as to „strengthening the global trading system”.¹² This approach is noteworthy taking into account the new global situation in this respect: the rhetoric of the Trump admin-

istration in the USA and its policies, exemplified by recently introduced tariffs on imports of steel and aluminium.

The MIKTA envisions itself as a strong voice ‘for good’ representing five ‘middle powers’ situated in opposite corners of the world but still „like-minded on many of the global challenges of our time” that has a significant capacity to achieve extraordinary results in promoting its goals in the future. These are: playing „a constructive role in the international agenda and exert greater influence”. Obviously, the network’s members already exert remarkable influence in their respective regions.

Members’ positions

1. Mexico

Mexico, a North American ‘middle power’ with a population of 130 million, is ‘locked’ between the USA and Brazil. It’s membership in the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) proved succesful but Mexico is seeking to rebuild its strength by further diversification of its international presence, especially where it has been deficient. Mexico’s MIKTA engagement can be seen a part of these efforts and – paradoxically - it’s a particularly attractive forum thanks to the relatively

⁹ <http://www.mikta.org/about/vision.php>

¹⁰ <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/mikta-fm-joint-communicue.aspx>

¹¹ <http://www.mikta.org/about/vision.php>

¹² <https://www.kemlu.go.id/en/berita/Pages/mikta-fm-joint-communicue.aspx>

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weak ties it imposes on its participants. On the other hand, MIKTA offers real opportunities to enhance multilateral and (often more important) bilateral cooperation in terms of economy and technology, trade and investment.

A very interesting example is Mexico-South Korea „ever growing partnership”.¹³ Apart of MIKTA, both countries share the membership of G20, APEC, OECD and FEALAC¹⁴ where – as they declare - they actively work for „development, climate change, green growth, biodiversity, education, the restructuring of international organizations and the strengthening of mechanisms to achieve global peace and prosperity, including efforts for disarmament and non-proliferation.”¹⁵ Korea is Mexico’s sixth-largest trading partner and Mexico the first economic partner for Korea in Latin America.¹⁶

2. Indonesia

Indonesia - an Asian country with a massive population and a vibrant culture - used to be a champion of the Non-Alignment Movement and still is the informal leader of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Interestingly, it is the only non-OECD member within the MIKTA network. Definitely, Indonesia is a force „for change”.¹⁷ Encircled by regional or global superpowers it’s in search of ways to build its own standing that transcends the very notion of the ‘middle power’. In fact, Indonesia envisions itself as a major player in international affairs.¹⁸ MIKTA with its declared vision of amending global institutions and organizations, provides Indonesia with a useful and practical platform to voice its ideas, concerns and projects in this respect.

In 2018, Indonesia holds the MIKTA’s rotative chairmanship with the theme: "Fostering Creative Economy and Contributing to Global Peace," that covers following, main topics: developing creative economy and innovation to maintain global peace, including counter-terrorism, cyber security, and migration issues. Indonesia has

¹³ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3004508>

¹⁴ The Forum for East Asia-Latin America Cooperation.

¹⁵ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3004508>

¹⁶ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3004508>

¹⁷ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/miktas-next-steps/>

¹⁸ <http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/10/24/mikta-what-does-it-want.html>

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the potential, building on its Bandung legacy and a non-confrontation policies, to reliably promote and expand the MIKTA goals both among its participants and non-member developing nations.

3. South Korea

South Korea can be credited as the MIKTA's originator. The network's very idea plays well with that country's global ambitions and enables it to reach out beyond its geopolitics and 'necessary' dependence on the United States. Moreover, the platform has already passed a test of being an indispensable facilitator for at least two of its participants: South Korea and Australia. China's rise with the ensuing president Xi Jinping's grand Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has so far created very many opportunities as well as challenges in Asia and around the world. The Beijing-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) is one of them and sometimes is deemed a competitor for the Japan/US-led Asian Development Bank (ADB).¹⁹

The United States tried to discourage its allies from joining the AIIB but without success. Interestingly, the MIKTA partici-

pation played a truly constructive role in the decision-making. As a senior Korean official admitted: "In the process of deciding to participate in the AIIB, Korea and Australia consulted with each other closely". "It is because we have similar interests, but there was also this aspect of wanting to respond together because we are both MIKTA countries."²⁰

This is also the North Korean nuclear threat and non-proliferation issues that weigh heavily on the MIKTA's agenda. The grouping itself and as well as the individual members issued several statements on the DPRK's nuclear and missile tests.

4. Turkey

Turkey, while participating neither in G7 nor in the BRICS, found MIKTA an attractive forum for its foreign policy agenda, including counter terrorism and a reform of international financial institutions. President Erdogan has long been a vocal critic of some deficits within the present United Nations system, and especially the Security Council with its five permanent members. The MIKTA network may provide Turkey

¹⁹ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3002672>

²⁰ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3002672>

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with an useful tool to advocate proposed, much awaited changes both among the emerging and established powers. Conversely, its presence in the grouping is critical for MIKTA as for many years, Turkey has been a role and development model for many Muslim and developing nations. The country's participation is also strategically important as it's a kind of bridge between Europe and the Middle East and Western Asia.

The MIKTA diplomats rightly point to the opportunities the network brings for Turkey: "One of Turkey's key diplomatic policies is to expand its influence and voice in foreign affairs, and it recognizes that MIKTA is a good mechanism for this".²¹ In its official declarations, Turkey sees the network as a platform that may help developing solutions to both regional and global issues and is „instrumental to improve its bilateral relations with Mexico, Indonesia, Korea and Australia".²²

In 2015 and 2016, Turkey has been shaken by a series of bloody terrorist attacks and in July, 2016 it witnessed an attempted coup

with hundreds of victims. Against this backdrop, MIKTA proved for Turkey a vital tool for cooperation in counter-terrorism activities and prevention of violent extremism in coordination with the United Nations. The grouping offered Turkey solidarity and became a forum on which it could explain its situation and actions and also highlight the threats it was confronted with. After the foiled coup attempt, MIKTA in its Joint Communiqué denounced „any group that seeks to undermine democracy" in Turkey.²³

The Syrian war has now lasted for seven years and created an immense humanitarian crisis with Turkey not only directly threatened by the hostilities but – what is of particular importance – receiving more than three million of refugees. The MIKTA grouping has been very active in humanitarian and international relief work, including many initiatives promoting inclusion of refugees with the special attention payed to the girls' education and empowerment of women. In 2016, Istanbul hosted the World Humanitarian Summit and MIKTA also

²¹ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3002672>

²² http://www.mfa.gov.tr/mikta-_meksika_-endonezya_-kore_-avustralya_.en.mfa

²³ 8 MIKTA Foreign Ministers Meeting Joint Communique, November 25, 2016
<http://www.mikta.org/document/joint.php?pn=1&sn=&st=&sc=&sd=&sdate=&edate=&sfld=&sor t=&at=view&idx=246>

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engaged in the working on the Global Compact on Refugees and a Global Compact on Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration where Mexico got appointed as co-facilitator in the Conference at the UN to adopt the Global Compact in 2018 (MIKTA 2016).

Turkey held its chairmanship of the MIKTA in 2017 and it proved to be a success as it hosted the first ever Policy Planning Consultations in Istanbul, on 10 July 2017. It was a workshop where diplomats exchanged views on „various global and regional trends and issues”.²⁴

Furthermore, during Turkey's chairmanship, there were three Ministerial Meetings, a large number of other intra-MIKTA meetings, events related to counter-terrorism, humanitarian issues, as well as to trade and economic relations, and events related to gender equality where Turkey was also very active.

5. Australia

Australia's place among MIKTA's is particularly important taking into account its

well-established position among world advanced economies, and its participation in the grouping came to some observers as a surprise. But its engagement is quite natural: it enables Australia to directly reach out to four 'middle powers' in four continents that exert remarkable influence in their respective regions, and forge with them closer economic and strategic ties. It also produces opportunities for Australia to expand its soft power across Asia and Indo-Pacific. However, contrary to Indonesia and (probably) Turkey, Australia doesn't seek to reform the global order; instead it is highly interested in boosting its own trade and in strengthening and maintenance of the economic and financial system that has brought it prosperity.²⁵

Australia has nonetheless been very supportive of the UN Secretary General's reform proposals, and is actively working within the MIKTA grouping to promote MIKTA statements and activities to support the UNSG's initiatives.

Within the MIKTA framework Australia's contribution has been critical in initiatives aimed at enhancing of innovation, gender equality, good governance and supporting

²⁴ <http://www.mikta.org/project/workshops.php?at=view&idx=290&ckattemp=1>

²⁵ <https://thediplomat.com/2017/09/miktas-next-steps/>

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Sustainable Development Goals. From Australia's perspective MIKTA is delivering at all levels, as it allows useful, frank exchanges between foreign ministers that are free of the bureaucracy and tension surrounding other multilateral meetings; it's been engaged in defence of the multilateral trading system as well as collaboration in multilateral forums on global challenges, and between the grouping's Embassies in non-MIKTA capitals.²⁶

Conclusions

MIKTA as a cross-regional grouping is still hardly recognizable among average citizens of its five participants.²⁷ It creates challenges as without public awareness of its very existence it cannot be what it wishes: a real „force for good” on the global stage. On the other hand, with its various initiatives and programs the MIKTAs have been definitely creating opportunities to improve the situation.

MIKTA has many strengths and weaknesses. Its highly informal nature belongs to both realms but probably without the much cherished flexibility it could not survive for a long time. Most likely, the Australian insight provides us with clues because the Australians are both optimistic as well as realistic about what MIKTA can achieve: „MIKTA's membership is – by design – diverse in terms of geography, culture, religion, membership of regional bodies and rates of economic development. Given this, there will inevitably be some issues where MIKTA countries have little in common. The success of MIKTA in multilateral forums has been that countries do not seek to agree on a MIKTA position among themselves and then convince the world to adopt it. Instead, the approach is to facilitate respectful conversations about contentious issues and seek to identify ways forward.”²⁸

²⁶ The insights on the Australia's role in the MIKTA grouping courtesy of the Australian Embassy in Warsaw.

²⁷ <http://koreajoongangdaily.joins.com/news/article/article.aspx?aid=3004345>,
<http://www.thejakartapost.com/news/2013/10/24/mikta-what-does-it-want.html>

²⁸ The insights courtesy of the Australian Embassy in Warsaw.

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