

CAMBODIA'S ASEM CHAIRMANSHIP 2020

Small Country
with Big Tasks





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Freedom, justice and solidarity are the basic principles underlying the work of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS). The KAS is a political foundation, closely associated with the Christian Democratic Union of Germany (CDU). As co-founder of the CDU and the first Chancellor of the Federal Republic of Germany, Konrad Adenauer (1876-1967) united Christian-social, conservative and liberal traditions. His name is synonymous with the democratic reconstruction of Germany, the firm alignment of foreign policy with the trans-Atlantic community of values, the vision of a unified Europe and an orientation towards the social market economy. His intellectual heritage continues to serve both as our aim as well as our obligation today. In our European and international cooperation efforts we work for people to be able to live self-determined lives in freedom and dignity. We make a contribution underpinned by values to helping Germany meet its growing responsibilities throughout the world.

KAS has been working in Cambodia since 1994, striving to support the Cambodian people in fostering dialogue, building networks and enhancing scientific projects. Thereby, the foundation works towards creating an environment conducive to economic and social development. All programs are conceived and implemented in close cooperation with the Cambodian partners on central and sub-national levels.

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Asian Vision Institute (AVI), established in January 2019, is an independent research think tank based in Cambodia. The creation of the institute was inspired by its leadership's visions to build peaceful, inclusive, adapting and sustainable societies in Asia, as well as to promote the so-called Asian values with a strong emphasis on humanity, peace and the respect of cultural diversity. To translate these visions into reality, the institute sets out the following missions: (1) conducting practical policy and program research, (2) strengthening multi-stakeholder dialogue and cross-sectional partnerships, and (3) promoting knowledge sharing and building leadership and innovation capacity. To date, Asian Vision Institute has produced a number of research publications in the forms of commentary articles, policy briefs and perspective papers with which both governments and private sectors have consulted and used as their references to make informed and appropriate policy decisions in response to the evolving regional and global situations.

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Cambodia's ASEM Chairmanship 2020

Small Country with Big Tasks



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FOREWORD

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an Asian-European political dialogue forum founded in 1996 with an aim to enhance relations and cooperation between the countries in Asia and Europe. The initial goal of ASEM at its inception was to provide a platform to foster political dialogues, strengthen economic and cultural cooperation, and tackle global challenges.

From 2020 onwards, Asia and Europe need to deepen their cooperation in multi-faceted areas given growing trade and connectivity initiatives between the two regions, and the threat of trade protectionism in other parts of the world. In terms of trade, the bilateral turnover between the two continents has so far reached €1.5 trillion per annum, and their combined Gross Domestic Products account for approximately 60 per cent of the global GDP. Apart from the growing trade, the number of connectivity initiatives still lag behind the development needs of the two continents. In addition, the global trade today has been significantly curtailed by the rising trade protectionism steered by certain global powers; therefore, Asian and European countries should endeavour to defend the multilateral trading system for continuous and shared economic prosperity.

Next year, the Kingdom of Cambodia, as an ASEM member, has the great pleasure to host the 13th Asia-Europe Summit for the very first time in the history of this small nation. This is a great opportunity for Cambodia to showcase its achievements and grab the opportunities brought by initiatives of the forum.

However, the Kingdom is also facing some difficulties in hosting such a big historical event. In order to overcome the hardship, the Kingdom is expected to learn from the past experiences of different countries in organising the event, as well as to come up with substantial initiatives, which bring tangible and positive outcomes for the deepening cooperation between the two continents. In doing so, the Asian Vision Institute (AVI), an independent think tank based in Cambodia, in collaboration with Konrad Adenauer Stiftung (KAS) in Phnom Penh, decided to publish a book entitled: "Cambodia's ASEM

Chairmanship 2020: Small Country with Big Tasks”.

This book is a compilation of perspectives and inputs of prominent scholars and senior foreign policy makers across Asia and Europe with the aim to provide knowledge about what ASEM is, its relevance, opportunities and challenges of implementing ASEM initiatives, perspectives of the ASEM partners towards the forum, and what can be done to concretise the ASEM cooperation initiatives. Furthermore, the book provides insights into rationales of Cambodia’s decision to chair such a big event, despite its limited resources.

We, the AVI and KAS team members, believe that this book will be a big contribution to readers in their pursuit of knowledge about ASEM-related issues, and to those attempting to address and overcome challenges facing the forum. Needless to say, the book is undoubtedly useful for policy makers, academics and students of International Relations.

We wish you a good read and new insights!

Phnom Penh, 15 August 2019

Mr. Leng Thearith and Mr. Robert Hör

ASEM in FACTS

1996
established

53
partners

12
summits





Current ASEM Coordinators:

ASEM Coordinators are appointed by their respective regions and facilitate the coordination of the ASEM Process.

Asian Coordinators:
Singapore, Pakistan

European Coordinators:
European External Action Service, Finland

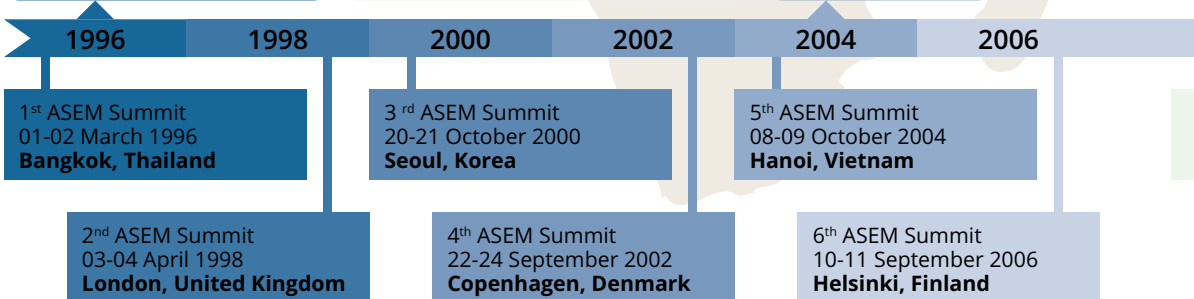
ASEM Partners represent:

- 60%** of global population 
- 65%** of global economy 
- 55%** of global trade 
- 75%** of global tourism 



So far there have been:

- 63** Ministerial meetings
- 12** Summits 
- 39** Forums 
- 437** Events 
- 117** Senior official meetings



Key characteristics

- Informality
- Multi-dimensionality
- Emphasis on equal partnership
- Dual focus on high-level and people-to-people

50% of Asia's exports go to Europe



50% of Asia's imports come from Europe

Three pillars of cooperation

Political

Economic and Finance

Social, Culture and Education

Relevant issues



Environment



Climate Change



Migration



Counter-terrorism

2008

7th ASEM Summit
24-25 October 2008
Beijing, China

2010

8th ASEM Summit
04-05 October 2010
Brussels, Belgium

9th ASEM Summit
05-06 November 2012
Vientiane, Lao PDR

2012

10th ASEM Summit
16-17 October 2014
Milan, Italy

2014

11th ASEM Summit
15-16 July 2016
Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia

2016

12th ASEM Summit
18-19 October 2018
Brussels, Belgium

2018

13th ASEM Summit
2020
Phnom Penh, Cambodia

2020



Reading time: 13 minutes*

Introduction to Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

Dr. Chheang Vannarith¹

¹ Dr. Chheang Vannarith is a public policy analyst and government relations strategist. He has over a decade of experience as a geopolitical and political economic analyst, with a focus on Southeast Asia. He is currently serving as President of the Asian Vision Institute, Chairman of the Advisor Council of the National Assembly of Cambodia, Advisor to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, and Adjunct Lecturer at the School of Social Sciences, Nanyang Technological University. He was honored a Young Global Leader by the World Economic Forum in 2013 and Southeast Asia Young Leader by the IISS-Shangri-La Dialogue in 2016.

He previously served as Visiting Fellow at ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute (2017-2018), China Institute of International Studies (2016), Institute of Developing Economies in Japan (2012), and East-West Center in the United States (2010); Southeast Asia Consultant at The Nippon Foundation in Japan (2016-2018); Lecturer of Asia Pacific Studies at the University of Leeds (2013-2016), Executive Director of Cambodian Institute for Cooperation and Peace (2009-2013); Technical Advisor to the Cambodian National Assembly (2011); and Assistant to Cambodia's Defense Minister (2011-2012). He received his BA in International Relations from the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam in 2002, MA in International Relations from the International University of Japan in 2006, and PhD in Asia Pacific Studies from the Ritsumeikan Asia Pacific University in 2009.

Introduction

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an inter-regional, inter-governmental process established in 1996 to foster dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. Currently, it is composed of 51 member countries and two partner institutions —the European Union and the ASEAN Secretariat. ASEM addresses a wide range of issues including political, economic, financial, social, cultural, and educational issues of common interest based on the spirit of mutual respect, mutual trust, and equal partnership. ASEM has thus far become one of the key global actors, as it shares 60% of global population, 65% of global economy, 55% of global trade, and 75% of global tourism.² This chapter provides a broad-brush overview of ASEM, arguing that ASEM plays an important role in reinforcing open, inclusive and effective multilateralism for a shared growth and promoting a rules-based international order.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was initially conceived as an informal forum and process for dialogue and cooperation between East Asia and the EU. The idea of having a meeting of leaders from Asia and Europe originated at the Europe-East Asia Economic Summit held in Singapore in September 1994, during which economic cooperation was recognised by the leaders as the most effective means to strengthen the dialogue between the two regions. The EU wanted to reap the benefits from the dynamic Asia, whereas the latter viewed ASEM as a means to diversify their economic relations and to strengthen their foreign policy independence vis-à-vis the

US.³ In July 1994, the European Commission published *Towards a New Strategy for Asia* in order to tighten its economic ties with Asian countries. The strategy reads, “The rise of Asia is dramatically changing the world balance of economic power...The Union needs as a matter of urgency to strengthen its economic presence in Asia in order to maintain its leading role in the world economy.”⁴

In November 1994, Singapore and France proposed that an EU-Asia summit meeting be held with an aim to explore ways to build a new partnership between the two regions. Following the above proposal being made, the 1st ASEM Summit was held in Bangkok in March 1996, marking the inception of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process. The Commission Communication called *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships*, in September 2001, reaffirmed the EU’s goal to boost its political and economic presence across Asia. At that time, the EU’s notable goals included its contribution to peace and security in the region and the world through the expansion of its engagement with Asia, enhancement of mutual trade and investment flows between EU and Asia, the development of the less prosperous countries of the two regions, eradication of root causes of poverty, protection of human rights and democracy, promotion of good governance and the rule of law, establishment of global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries in appropriate international fora, identification of challenges and opportunities brought by globalisation, strengthening of joint efforts to cope with global environmental and security

2 ASEM Information Board, “Asem in Numbers,” ASEM Information Board, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/>.

3 Yeo Lay Hwee and Lopez I Vidal Iluc, “Regionalism and Interregionalism in the Asem Context: Current Dynamics and Theoretical Approaches,” (Barcelona: CIDOB, 2008).

4 Ji. Jason Xianbai, “Toward a New Eu Asia Strategy,” (Singapore: EU Centre in Singapore, 2016).

issues and the promotion of Asia's awareness of Europe and vice versa.⁵

The creation of ASEM was mainly driven by Europe's response to APEC and the fears of a fortress Europe on the part of East Asia.⁶ Mutual recognition of common interest in the early 1990s fostered cooperation and partnership between the two regions. ASEM initially comprised 10 Asian members (ASEAN 7 plus China, Japan and South Korea), 15 EU member states and the European Commission, have evolved into a trans-regional dialogue forum that consists of 53 partners. ASEM underwent five times of its membership enlargement beginning in 2004, and later in 2008, 2010, 2012 and 2014, respectively. ASEM aims to provide a platform to foster political dialogue, strengthen economic cooperation and tackle global challenges together and promote the exchange of ideas and best practices, thus acting as a breeding ground for new policy ideas. ASEM is a key building block for open, cooperative and rules-based international system. It can be regarded as the most influential comprehensive partnership platform, whereby various connectivity initiatives have been steadily materialised.⁷

“ASEM aims to provide a platform to foster political dialogue, strengthen economic cooperation and tackle global challenges together and promote the exchange of ideas and best practices, thus acting as a breeding

ground for new policy ideas.”

Against the backdrop of protectionism, unilateralism and anti-globalisation, ASEM has become one of the key institutional instruments in upholding an open multilateral system basing on the principles of informality, flexibility, mutual respect in the spirit of consensus, equal partnership and mutual benefits. The Chair's Statement of the 12th ASEM Summit in 2018 stressed the increasing relevance of ASEM in enhancing “effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order anchored in international law and with the United Nations at its core”. The ASEM leaders also expressed their commitment to work together for peace, security, sustainable development and prosperity, while promoting an open world economy and upholding the rules-based multilateral trading system with the World Trade Organization at its core.⁸

The Chair's Statement also expressed the commitment to fully implement the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals and to build an inclusive and sustainable future for all; it aimed to leave no one behind and to focus on helping the most vulnerable ones. The ASEM leaders agreed to work together on strengthening global responses to climate change through ambitious climate actions including the promotion of renewable energy, energy efficiency and other low-emission technologies, industry, transportation, agriculture and forestry, innovation, mobilisation of finance, resilience, disaster management and risk reduction. They also comprise the prevention of deforestation and desertification, which includes water scarcity, etc.⁹

5 Commission of the European Communities, “Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships,” in Communication from the Commission (Brussels: Commission of the European Communities, 2001).

6 Yeo Lay Hwee, “The Origins and Development of Asem and Eu-East Asia Relations,” in *Europe and Asia: Region in Flux*, ed. Murray Philomena (Palgrave Mcmillan, 2008).

7 ASEM Information Board, “Asem Process,” ASEM Information Board, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/asem-process>.

8 Asia Europe Meeting, “Global Partners for Global Challenges,” news release, 2018, <https://cdn.aseminfoboard.org/documents/ASEM12-Chairs-Statement.pdf>.

9 Ibid.

Areas of Cooperation

ASEM promotes inter-regional cooperation between Asia and Europe under three pillars— politics, economics and finance, and people-to-people. These three pillars are interconnected. Sustainable development, climate change and migration are generally regarded as cross-cutting issues that require the involvement of key stakeholders under these three pillars. Realising the UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030 has become one of ASEM's key agenda items. At the ASEM Conference in May 2019, the participants called for enhancing ASEM contributions to global efforts in the implementation of the SDGs and furthering exchange of views, lessons learned, best practices among ASEM members and other partners in order to integrate SDGs into development plans from a long-term and cross-sectoral perspective.¹⁰

ASEM political pillar's activities concentrate on international crisis, security, multilateralism. In addition, it seeks to open the dialogue with policymakers from Europe and Asia. ASEM top leaders and ministers have regularly exchanged their views, and occasionally taken a common stance on international and regional developments of common interest. The ASEM political pillar also helps to strengthen the multilateral system and to promote an Asia-Europe dialogue on key issues such as arms control, disarmament, international terrorism, weapons of mass destruction and non-proliferation, environmental issues, human rights, migration, and the UN re-

forms. Building cooperation and partnership with the United Nations has become one of the key agenda items of ASEM. The 4th ASEM Summit in Copenhagen on 22-24 September 2002, decided that ASEM partners should continue this political dialogue by establishing an ad-hoc informal consultative mechanism enabling ASEM coordinators and senior officials to exchange views on significant international events.¹¹

Under the economic and financial pillar, the dialogue focuses on the need to better manage economic globalisation by promoting multilateralism, sustainable development, business frameworks between the two regions, and innovative ideas in the field of finance. The issues relating to the World Trade Organization are always high on the agenda. The main issues discussed at the Summits include trade facilitation and trade security, trade and development, regionalism and multilateralism, information and communication technology focusing on the aspect of competition and liberalisation, and investment issues. ASEM financial dialogue mainly concentrates on macro-economic issues by regularly reviewing the global economic situation and financial developments in both regions.¹²

The social and cultural pillar of ASEM is aimed at strengthening cultural links and people-to-people contacts — indispensable elements to promote a greater awareness and understanding between the two regions. By creating networked personal links, it can overcome misperceptions that may exist, thus fastening a perception of common interests.

10 "Asem Conference on Promoting Economic and Social Inclusion in Asia and Europe," news release, 15-17 May, 2019, https://cdn.aseminfoboard.org/documents/Summary-Report_Final.pdf.

11 ASEM Information Board, "Political Pillar," ASEM Information Board, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/pillars-of-asem/political>.

12 "Economic and Financial Pillar," ASEM Information Board, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/pillars-of-asem/economic-financial>.

At the ASEM conference on Cultures and Civilisations in 2003, the ASEM ministers in charge of cultures or relevant portfolios and eminent partners from civil society groups agreed to promote cultural diversity, dialogue and cooperation among different civilisations through promoting exchanges on cultural policies, preserving and promoting traditional and contemporary forms of arts and culture.¹³

In addition to the three pillars of cooperation, ASEM began introducing areas of focus and related actions on connectivity in 2018. ASEM's connectivity activities rely on existing sectoral mechanisms, including the use of thematic ASEM ministerial meetings, preparatory Senior Official Meetings (SOMs), Directors General (DG) meetings and other competent ASEM forums. The areas of focus consist of connectivity policies, sustainable connectivity (promotion of quality infrastructure, sustainability of financing, sustainable supply chains, ensuring free, open and safe maritime transportation, clean energy technologies), trade and investment connectivity (free, open and vibrant trade and investment, custom clearance facilitation, promotion of transport connectivity, future connectivity and digital economy, and security challenges linked to connectivity such as cybersecurity, infectious disease control and food security).¹⁴ Effective multilateralism and a rules-based international order and Asia-Europe connectivity are mutually reinforcing. The Brussels Report on Strengthening ASEM Connectivity in 2018 assessed the drivers for deepening ASEM connectivity and effectively using ASEM's connec-

tivity mechanisms to deliver results for global development programmes. ASEM has chosen to give its strength to support its member countries and global institutions alike in order to make progress towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and to create conditions under which benefits of development can be shared under the motto "Leaving No One Behind". The combined strength of ASEM will be important for the global community to respond effectively to global challenges. ASEM's connectivity mechanisms have a strong knowledge and capacity-sharing base, which contribute to the realisation of development goals in Asia and Europe.¹⁵

The Danube-Mekong Cooperation Initiative is a concrete example of ASEM connectivity concentrating on sustainable development issues. It shows the way forward for further cooperation between ASEM partners under the framework of the ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue, and encourages further concerted actions for tangible cooperation on water-related issues through transboundary, sub-regional and bi-regional cooperation.¹⁶ A network of bilateral cooperation is critical to realising this vision. For instance, Cambodia and Hungary, in June 2019, signed a bilateral agreement which covers multifaceted cooperation between the Mekong and the Danube region.

Key Characteristics

ASEM is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation with the aim to facilitate and stimulate progress in other fora, but it does

¹³ "Social, Cultural and Educational Pillar," ASEM Information Board, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/pillars-of-asem/social-cultural-educational>.

¹⁴ "Apgc Plan for Areas of Focus and Related Actions on Connectivity," news release, 2019, <https://cdn.aseminfoboard.org/documents/APGC-Plan-for-Area-of-Focus-and-Related-Actions-on-Connectivity.pdf>.

¹⁵ Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, "Brussels Report on Strengthening Asia Europe Connectivity : Drawing Synergy from Global Development and Governance Programmes," ed. Prakash Anita (2018).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 94-100.

not seek to duplicate what has been done within bilateral and other multilateral settings between the member countries. The key characteristics of the ASEM Process include: *Informality*—aimed at providing an open forum for policy makers and officials to discuss any political, economic and socio-cultural issues of common interest, complementing the works being carried out in bilateral and other multilateral fora; *Multi-dimensionality*—covering the full spectrum of relations between the two regions and devotes equal weight to political, economic and socio-cultural dimensions; *Equal partnership*—stressing the principles of mutual respect and mutual benefit; *State-led and people-centred cooperation*—providing a platform for meetings of Heads of States and Governments, ministers and senior officials with an increasing focus on fostering contacts between the peoples from the two regions).¹⁷

“The key characteristics of the ASEM Process include informality, multi-dimensionality, equal partnership and state-led and people-centred cooperation.”

Working Methods

ASEM is not an international organisation, and has no secretariat. Foreign Ministers and their senior officials (ASEM-SOM) have an overall coordinating role within the ASEM Process, and are assisted by an informal group of coordinators [2 from the Asian side – representing the ASEAN and non-ASEAN (NESA) groups, and 2 from the European side – the European External Action Service (EEAS) as permanent coordinator and the rotating EU Presidency]. The ASEM Summit is the highest decision-making

body. It takes place biannually with the participation of the Heads of State and Government, the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

The working methods, adopted at the 3rd ASEM Summit (ASEM3) in 2000, outline the following principles:

- Meetings should be more informal and interactive. To this end, the Chair should be active in realising this goal. Appropriate informal intervals and retreat sessions could be useful tools.
- By setting focused agenda items with a few topics, ASEM’s added value will be assured for all meetings. ASEM partners could also consult regularly before international meetings.
- ASEM initiatives/activities should be linked to the dialogue and be supportive of it. Presenting activities in clusters can facilitate reaching synergies within the ASEM process but also within a cluster; organisers/facilitators especially within a cluster are invited to discuss about the agenda and timing.
- In order to gain more time for dialogue, the Chair shall be responsible for reflecting fairly the outcomes of meetings in short and factual statements. Summits and Ministerial Meetings consensus on Chair’s Statements (CS) should be reached through close coordination among partners. However, it was confirmed at the meeting that consensus shall not be interpreted as meaning that texts would be

¹⁷ ASEM Information Board, “Fostering Dialogue and Cooperation between Asia and Europe,” ASEM Information Board., <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/overview>.



© Sou Pisen - A meeting between young scholars from Europe and Asia at the 21st ASEM Summer University in Australia.

negotiated word-for-word. Separate negotiated political declarations on specific subjects in addition to the Chair's statement, if appropriate, could be issued, thereby raising the visibility of the issue treated.

- In order to raise the visibility of ASEM, reaching out to the public is necessary. The ASEM Senior Officials saw the importance of involvement of various sectors of society in the ASEM Process. On ASEM events, host countries may, at their discretion, organise activities with businesses, think tanks and other sectors of society. These events will be open to all ASEM partners.

Meetings

The summits are attended by Heads of State and Government of the ASEM countries, the President of the European Council, President of the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretary General. They serve as the highest level of decision-making body of the ASEM. The summits are held every second year, alternating Asia and Europe. In conjunction with each summit, side events such as the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting (ASEP), the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), the Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF), and the ASEM Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS) are organised.

The Foreign Ministers' Meetings are attended

by the EU's High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security policy, Ministers of Foreign Affairs of the ASEM countries and the ASEAN Secretary General. They are responsible for overall coordination of the ASEM Process, and act as a driving force of the ASEM political dialogue. In addition, Finance, Culture, Economic, Education, Labour, Transport, Environment and Employment Ministers meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. Additional ministerial conferences are held irregularly on specific issues and areas not covered by the main ministerial meetings.

The Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) bring together high-level civil servants from the Foreign Ministries of all ASEM Partners for the overall coordination of the ASEM process. Sectoral SOMs are also held in preparation of the various ministerial meetings.

Other meetings include Customs Directors-General Meetings, Conferences of Directors-General of Immigration, Mayors and Governors' Meetings or ad hoc activities on topics pertaining to sustainable development, nuclear safety, disaster risk reduction, biodiversity and others.

Informal Supporting Mechanisms

Several informal supporting mechanisms have been created to promote dialogue and practical cooperation with an ultimate aim of realising the main objectives set out in the three pillars of ASEM. These include the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP), the Asia-Europe Foundation, the Asia-Europe Business Forum and ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme

- **Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP)** Meeting is a part of the overall Asia-Europe partnership process. It serves as a forum for interparliamentary contacts, exchanges and diplomacy among parliaments, with an ultimate aim to promote mutual understanding among the peoples and countries in Asia and Europe. ASEP meetings are convened on a regular bi-annual basis, alternate between Asia and Europe, and normally take place before the ASEM Summit.

- **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** is an important and central institution of the social, cultural and educational pillar. To date, ASEF is the only permanent institution of the ASEM process. Since its inception in 1997, ASEF has been very active in implementing its mandate, especially given its large scope of action and its resources. ASEF's mandate is to promote and catalyse intellectual, cultural, and people-to-people exchanges between Europe and Asia.

- **Asia-Europe Young Leaders Summit (ASEFYLS)** is organised to promote interactions among the young leaders from Asia and Europe and provides opportunities for the young leaders to meet political leaders, top-tier business representatives, and prominent thinkers. The ASEFYLS takes place alongside the ASEM Summits or the ASEM Ministers' Meetings.

- **Asia-Europe Peoples' Forum (AEPF)** is an interregional network of progressive civil society organisations across Asia and Europe. Since 1996, the AEPF has remained the only continuing network linking Asian and European NGOs and social movements. It has assumed the unique

function of fostering people's solidarity across the two regions and has become a vehicle for advancing the people's voice within Asia-Europe relations.

- **Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF)** is an annual meeting, where private and public sectors meet to exchange views, network and debate issues in specific working groups. AEBF provides an opportunity for the business communities from Asia and Europe to review issues relating to trade and investment matters, as well as to provide some inputs to the official dialogue. As a matter of fact, private sector has an important role to play in identifying obstacles to trade and investment in ASEM countries.

- **The ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme**, funded by ASEM partners, is a fellowship-granting programme for university students and teachers in pairs (DUO) of ASEM countries who wish to go to Europe or Asia (i.e. Asians to Europe, Europeans to Asia) for further study, research or joint lectures. This fellowship programme, established in 2001, aims to contribute to enhancing reciprocal academic exchanges between students and teachers of the European Union and those of Asian countries of ASEM.

Conclusion and Recommendations

ASEM is the most dynamic inter-regional cooperation between Asia and Europe. By adopting a "soft" institutionalism, ASEM provides flexibility and comfortability to all member countries and institutions. However, due to increasing challenges posed by global development and changes, ASEM needs to forge

a common vision, take more concrete measures to strengthen social and economic inclusiveness, and advance an inclusive, open, effective, and rules-based multilateral system. The remarkable shift in the geopolitical balance of power have a major impact on economic and security development across the countries and regions. Moreover, the return of great power politics, compounded with renewed economic nationalism, protectionism, populist politics, and unilateralism, have put multilateral system at a greater risk.

As the centre of global economic gravity has shifted towards Asia, Europe has adjusted its strategies and deepened its engagement with Asia. Against the backdrop of global power shifts and changing pattern of economic interdependence, ASEM needs to have a practical plan for structural reforms that entail management of changes, especially to reap the benefits stemming from a rising and dynamic Asia. ASEM is expected to play a critical role in enhancing a rules-based international order amidst the uncertain and volatile world. Countries in both regions must double down their efforts to save the future of multilateralism, especially through the enhancement of multilateral trading system and the reforms of the World Trade Organization (WTO).

To strengthen its relevance, ASEM must continuously reform to strengthen its institution and implement its commitment in order to respond to new realities and changes. Some scholars and observers of ASEM have suggested the following:

- Enhancing Europe-Asia partnership will become increasingly relevant in dealing with threats and challenges, as well as in taking advantage of opportunities in an

increasingly interconnected world.¹⁸

- ASEM partners should move beyond their sole focus on the development of closer interregional ties to the impacts and implications of global changes on their partnership and the global responsibilities that ASEM must bear.¹⁹

- In order to enhance ASEM's role as an important interregional forum, or a tool that may contribute to global governance and to help shape the new world order, two things need to happen. First, East Asia must be further integrated so as to become a distinct regional and global actor. Second, the EU must be willing and prepared to shoulder more global responsibilities.²⁰

- A dynamic ASEM can be materialised only when some policy entrepreneurs or political leaders highly regard ASEM as a test bed and a platform for experiment towards a more networked approach in international cooperation, and when they try strengthening Asia-Europe ties for mutual benefits.²¹

- ASEM partners should focus on its relevance and building up its credibility. ASEM should learn to feel comfortable in its own skin, rather than to compare itself

fruitlessly to other international or interregional fora.²²

- With some strategic thinking and a clear setting of priorities, ASEM can capitalise on dialogue on issues of mutual interests, and seek common understanding and positions that may be helpful in supporting the global agenda in addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing all of us.²³

18 Walter Kemp, Indra Abeldinova, and Ariun Enkhsaikhan, "Setting the Agenda for Greater Asia-Europe Cooperation and Connectivity," in *Asia-Europe Connectivity Vision 2025: Challenges and Opportunities*, ed. Prakash Anita (Jakarta: Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia, 2016), 11-24.

19 M. Dent Christopher, "The Asia-Europe Meeting and Inter-Regionalism: Toward a Theory of Multilateral Utility," *Asian Survey* 44, no. 2 (2004).

20 Lay Hwee.

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Reading time: 17 minutes*

“Multilateralism Light”? The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the Rescue of a Rules-Based International Order

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Introduction

Multilateralism has come under siege (Weiss 2019). Major international organizations such as the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organization (WTO), the Climate Change regime or regional organizations such as the European Union (EU) or the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are increasingly paralyzed. While US President Donald Trump's "America First" policy and Brexit are the most visible symptoms of this development, the trend itself is not new. With the rise of new powers such as the BRICS states China, India, Russia, Brazil and South Africa and the failure of the West to accommodate them adequately in the existing global institutional architecture, strains emerged in the post-Cold War international order. This order is primarily shaped by Western liberal norms and decision-making procedures which in the international financial institutions (IFIs) in particular privilege Western nations. Starting in the late 1990s, due to lack of ownership, new powers began to consider this order to be illegitimate. In the process, existing international institutions increasingly became arenas for power contests in which membership, decision-making procedures, norms and mandates are contested, with the result that negotiations of urgent global and regional policy issues were relegated to a backseat and often deadlocked (Rüland 2012, 2018; Pisani-Ferry 2019).

The emergence of right-wing nationalist populism in many parts of the world further jeopardizes multilateralism. These forces intentionally utilize fake news, oversimplification and blatant lies, and are hostile to globalization, globalism and global governance, which they regard as processes curtailing national

sovereignty.²

While in Europe right-wing populist parties in government have so far mainly been phenomena in Eastern European accession states including Hungary, Poland and Austria, since 2018 they have also governed in Italy, a founding member of the EU. But also in Western and Northern Europe, vocal Euro-skeptic parties, which disdain the inevitable complexities and compromise-prone, often lengthy and complicated negotiation processes of cross-border governance, have been voted into national and local parliaments. Even mainstream politicians such as the chairman of the German Christian Social Democrats (CSU), Markus Söder, approvingly declared the "end of orderly multilateralism."³ Outside the EU, Recep Tayyip Erdogan in Turkey, Vladimir Putin in Russia, Rodrigo Duterte in the Philippines and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil also stand for mercurial populist foreign policy agendas, which show little regard for principled multilateral policies. With the election of US President Donald Trump and the decision of the British electorate to leave the European Union, the swing towards nationalist populism has reached a preliminary climax. As the leader of the world's most powerful nation, the contempt US President Trump has expressed for multilateral institutions is particularly worrisome. Within hours of assuming office, he withdrew from the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), a 12-member free trade agreement of Pacific Rim nations, followed by abandoning the Paris Climate Change Agreement of 2015 and rescinding the 2015 nuclear

2 Emblematic is US President Trump's speech to the United Nation's General Assembly in September 2018 in which he stated: "We reject the ideology of globalism, and we embrace the doctrine of patriotism," available at: <https://news.un.org/en/story/2018/09/1020472>, (accessed 20 April 2019).

3 Die Zeit, 29 June 2018.

deal with Iran. In 2018 he also terminated the Intermediate Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, pulled out of the Global Compact for Safe, Orderly and Regular Migration, withdrew from the UN Human Rights Council and repeatedly threatened to leave the WTO, complaining that the organization does not treat the US fairly. This went hand in hand with unilaterally slapping punitive tariffs on Chinese and European products, thereby commencing a trade war which involves hundreds of billions of US dollars.

It will take a long time to restore the trust, social capital and goodwill accumulated in the emerging global governance system of the immediate post-Cold War period if it gives way to what high-ranking Chinese officials have criticized as “zero-sum mentality” and “isolationism,” referring specifically to the United States.⁴ The current situation thus requires urgency in the search for defenses for a multilateral global order. One of the candidates for such a defense is the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), an interregional forum founded in 1996 in Bangkok.⁵ The twelfth ASEM Summit held in October 2018 in Brussels ended with a strong call for the persistence of a multilateral world order. According to the chair’s statement “recent international developments have boosted the relevance of ASEM as a building block for effective multilateralism and the rules-based international order anchored in international law and with the United Nations at its core.”⁶ The question addressed in this article is thus how far ASEM

is indeed adequately prepared to act as a proponent and savior of multilateralism. The article will first discuss the ability of ASEM to contribute to such an objective, before evaluating its limits in a second step. The article ends with a conclusion, discussing concrete steps enabling ASEM to promote multilateralism beyond mere rhetoric.

How ASEM Helps to Protect Multilateralism

The twelfth meeting of the ASEM Summit took place under the theme of “Global Partners for Global Challenges,” a thinly veiled allusion to the unilateral, protectionist, and nationalist-populist tendencies in global politics cited above. It indicated that in a rapidly globalizing world with intensifying cross-border pathologies, international cooperation is beset by serious problems. Unsurprisingly, thus, the chair’s statement designated ASEM as “the main platform for Europe and Asia to strengthen dialogue, foster cooperation including on multilateralism and tackle global challenges together.”⁷ Although the chair’s statement did not mention the United States, and EU High Representative for European Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Federica Mogherini was quick to declare that ASEM is not directed against anyone,⁸ many observers including the Chinese media regarded it as an important opportunity for Asian and European countries “to push back against US unilateralism.”⁹ Trump’s beggar-thy-neighbor foreign policy and essentially bilateral deal-making approach was certainly also on

4 See an article contributed by Assistant Foreign Minister Zhang Ye to China Daily, 11 October 2018, and a speech by Foreign Minister Wang Yi at the Opening of the Symposium on the International Situation and China’s Foreign Relations in 2018, Thai News Service, 14 December 2018.

5 Including membership of the EU Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat.

6 ASEM Chair’s Statement, available at: <https://asean.org/>

chairs-statement-12th-asem-summit/, (accessed 21 April 2019).

7 Ibid.

8 Federica Mogherini in an interview with Premium Official News, 19 October 2018.

9 Global Times, 19 October 2018.

the mind of Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong, when during an ASEM Summit plenary session titled “Reinforcing the Multilateral System” he warned that “if countries take a purely realpolitik approach, acting on the basis that might is right, they may gain in the short term, but they will forego many more opportunities for win-win cooperation in the long term. This will ultimately not be sustainable.”¹⁰ His words were echoed by EU Council President Donald Tusk for whom “a world without rules is by definition a world of chaos”¹¹ and European Commission President Jean-Claude Juncker who opined that “only the multilateral approach allows us to confront global challenges.”¹²

ASEM leaders shared the view that the United Nations Charter must remain the cornerstone of a multilateral order.¹³ Of similar significance for them is the preservation of the WTO and the multilateral trading system, which is a precondition for free, fair and non-discriminatory trade. Leaders thus highlighted “their commitment to comply with WTO rules, cooperating on rendering its dispute settlement system more effective, and redoubling on-going efforts aimed at WTO reform.”¹⁴

ASEM leaders also identified the Paris Climate Change accord, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), also known as the Iran nuclear deal, and the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula as significant multilateral achievements. In other words, they explicitly

recognized that instabilities that arise from developments cutting across the political, military, economic, environmental and human dimensions can only be addressed effectively through a dense web of international dialogue and cooperation platforms.¹⁵

ASEM’s potential to champion multilateralism emanates from the fact that it is a large international forum by any standard. After five rounds of enlargement, it now counts fifty-three members.¹⁶ This represents more than a quarter of the globe’s nation states. Among ASEM’s members are some of the world’s most influential powers. Four of five permanent members of the UN Security Council - China, Russia, the United Kingdom and France – and three of five BRICS states – China, India and Russia – belong to the forum. Japan, Germany, Australia, South Korea, the EU and ASEAN are also active and influential international players. ASEM represents half of the world’s population and, economically, it stands for 50 percent of global GDP. Hosting the globe’s most dynamic economies, it handles 55 percent of worldwide trade. A forum of that size and stature that unanimously and vociferously supports multilateralism thus sends out a strong signal to the world that the dismantling of a rational, cooperation, dialogue, compromise and institution-based international order by its populist detractors is not a forgone conclusion.

“ASEM’s potential to champion multilateralism emanates from the fact that it is a large international forum by any standard.”

The ASEM chair’s statement has revived an

¹⁰ The Straits Times, 20 October 2018

¹¹ Euractiv, 19 October 2018.

¹² The Straits Times, 20 October 2018.

¹³ Chinese Politburo member Yang Jiechi at the Munich Security Conference. See China Daily, 17 February 2019.

¹⁴ ASEM Chair’s Statement, available at: <https://asean.org/chairs-statement-12th-asem-summit/>, (accessed 21 April 2019).

¹⁵ Hurriyet Daily News, 25 October 2018.

¹⁶ Including the EU Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat.

early scholarly debate about the forum's functions in the emerging global governance architecture. In the 2000s, interregional fora were seen as a novelty in an increasingly vertically and horizontally differentiated system of global governance, in which interregionalism became an intermediate level of agency, linking regional and global politics (Rüländ 1996, 2001, 2002, 2010, 2014; Doidge 2011). So-called “multilateral utility” functions (Dent 2004) were regarded as crucial for an effective multilateral order. “Multilateral utilities” boost global fora by making them more efficient, more democratic, more legitimate and more “nested,” that is, better integrated into the existing global governance architecture (Aggarwal 1998).

Interregional fora act as “multilateral utilities” if they facilitate international institution building, rationalizing global fora and agenda setting. Institution building refers to the fact that interregional fora constitute a new layer of action in the emerging system of global governance, complemented by subsidiary dialogue platforms, i.e. regular summits, ministerial meetings, senior official meetings, conventions of business leaders and ad hoc working groups. “Rationalizing” denotes the streamlining of overburdened global organizations by shifting unresolved problems downward to interregional or regional fora, and “agenda-setting” the advancement of new themes in international negotiations (Rüländ 2006). However, viewed from hindsight, while interregional institution building has indeed been prolific (Hänggi 2006), it has only partly strengthened global governance. Interregional fora tend to be shallow and examples of effective rationalizing and agenda-setting are difficult to find (Yeo 2003; Bersick 2004; Loewen 2004; Robles 2008; Doidge 2011; Fehrmann 2014; Hulse 2017). Whether European-Asian policy coordi-

nation in global organizations and fora such as the WTO, the IMF, the World Bank and the G20 will thus intensify after the ASEM 12 Summit and its unreserved support for a multilateral order, as predicted by Chinese observers, remains to be seen.¹⁷ Normally, bilateralism is at variance with multilateralism and tends to entrench realpolitik. Great powers in particular prefer bilateral relations in which they can extract greater benefits for themselves than in multilateral settings due to their superior political leverage. However, under certain conditions, the bilateralism inherent in multilateral fora through informal meetings at their sidelines may also become a building block for regional and global multilateralism. In the absence of binding global or regional multilateral agreements, they may preserve rule-based politics as a second or third best option. Cases in point are the EU-Singapore free trade area (FTA) concluded at the ASEM Summit in Brussels¹⁸ and the Forest Law Enforcement Governance and Trade (FLEGT) Voluntary Partnership Agreement (VPA) with Vietnam.¹⁹ The FTA is the first bilateral trade and investment deal between the EU and an ASEAN member state and thus may act as a precedent for additional agreements between the EU and ASEAN member states or even an incentive to create a so far elusive region-to-region FTA between the EU and ASEAN.²⁰ The “element of certainty”²¹ that Singaporean Prime Minister Lee Hsien Loong attributes to the FTA is certainly a key property of multilateral politics that

17 Statement by Chinese ambassador to the EU, Zhang Ming, in *China Plus*, 7 April 2019.

18 Channel News Asia, 19 October 2018.

19 Bridges Weekly, 25 October 2018.

20 Negotiations over an EU-ASEAN free trade area were put on hold in 2009 due to disagreements between the EU and ASEAN on Myanmar and the economic diversity among ASEAN member countries which militated against agreeable rule-making.

21 *Asia Times*, 23 October 2018.

can facilitate the transformation of bilateral agreements into multilateral policies. ASEM also facilitated the policy coordination at the sidelines of other multilateral fora such as the G20, for which the Asian members of ASEM – unlike the EU – did not have an established mechanism.²²

Why ASEM Cannot Be a Savior of Multilateralism – At Least Not Now

While it is very welcome that ASEM argues for a rules-based multilateral global order, further examination suggests that the forum has its limits in promoting and protecting multilateralism. The forum's size may legitimate its pro-multilateral stance and add force to it, but it is at the same time also an impediment as the call only rudimentarily glosses over great differences in the conceptualization of multilateralism (see also Christiansen & Tsui 2017: 246). Unsurprisingly, thus, ASEM's call for multilateralism is rather vague, barely concealing the great diversity of member interests.

The majority of old EU members are more oriented towards what can be described as a “principled” or “thick” multilateralism (Christiansen & Tsui 2017: 234); a multilateralism that is inspired by Ruggie's seminal post-Cold War definition denoting an

“institutional form which coordinates relations among three or more states on the basis of generalized principles of conduct – that is principles which specify appropriate conduct for a class of actions, without regard to the particularistic interests of the parties or the strategic exigencies that may

exist in any specific occurrence” (Ruggie 1992: 562).

Such a multilateralism prioritizes international law and relegates realpolitik and cunning political pragmatism to a secondary priority. This means that international law and its evolution should not be subordinated to short-term particularistic interests and strategic concerns as realpolitik and political pragmatism would demand. Rather should it facilitate the increasing legalization, contractualization and constitutionalization of international politics, thereby gradually transforming the essentially anarchical character of world politics into a system that would approximate the rules-based process of domestic politics characteristic of Western liberal democracies (Abbott & Snidal 2000; Zangl & Zürn 2004). As such a view of multilateralism assumes the existence of universal norms including (liberal) democracy and respect for (individual) human rights, it inevitably unfolds behind-the-border effects such as those inherent in the “responsibility to protect” norm if governments are not able or willing to implement such a normative order.

Asian states in their majority reject the Western brand of multilateralism, which they distrust as an attempt to establish “value hegemony” (Rüland 2012) and exert “soft” imperialism (Yeo 2018: 52). In other words, Western-type multilateralism is in their eyes precisely what Western governments deny: a subtle tool to shape the global institutional order and the power distribution within institutions in favor of the West. In particular, they resent the behind-the-border effects as a thinly veiled attempt to curtail the sovereignty of states that only a few decades ago had been colonized by Western powers.²³

22 East Asia Forum, 8 March 2009.

23 On the significance of sovereignty for non-Western states,

“ASEM’s call for multilateralism is rather vague, barely concealing the great diversity of member interests.”

It is thus no coincidence that Chinese representatives refer to the UN Charter with its emphasis on the equal sovereignty of states as the “cornerstone of the modern international order,”²⁴ as Politburo member Yang Jiechi did at the Munich Security Conference in February 2019. For China, and many other Asian states, sovereign equality including the non-interference norm are “the most important norm[s] governing state-to-state relations.”²⁵ Although China insists that it is at the forefront of building “a new type of international relations featuring mutual respect, fairness, justice and win-win cooperation, and the building of a community with a shared future for mankind,” its actual behavior suggests that it is firmly rooted in a traditional Westphalian type of order that at best retains what could be described as a “diminished,” “selective” and “executive” multilateralism. While emphasizing that its gigantic infrastructure and connectivity project, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is a Chinese production of public goods and a “win-win” endeavor for all participants, the reality is far from this lofty rhetoric. The BRI policy that “if you cannot repay Chinese investment economically, you repay politically,” shows how far the BRI is from an equitable distribution of gains. Economically, it cements a quasi-colonial asymmetric relationship in which recipients of BRI investments repay with raw materials; politically it threatens

to replace US-centric dependencies with Sino-centric ones.

While the official Chinese global governance philosophy celebrates “consultation and co-operation for shared benefits,” claims to firmly uphold “rules-based multilateralism,” and vows to “support the UN system as the key platform of global governance,”²⁶ it actually uses multilateral institutions for “soft” or institutional balancing and forum shopping, which is only marginally nested with existing institutional arrangements and thus leads to institutional redundancy. The multilateral institutions China and other Asian members of ASEM prefer are flexible broad-band consultative institutions conducive for institutional realpolitik and producing “soft law” at best. The BRI is hardly more than a large-scale balancing exercise to the American Pivot to the Asia-Pacific (Campbell 2016) and more recently the “Indo-Pacific” initiative of the Quad promoted by the US, Japan, Australia and India. Both policies are – not without reason – suspected in Beijing as strategies to contain or even encircle China. Another typical example of soft-balancing is the 16+1 Forum (with the recent accession of Greece, 17+1)²⁷ which China established with Eastern European countries, many of them members of the EU. While Beijing denies any intention of driving a wedge into the EU, it nevertheless consciously exploits “internal inconsistencies within Europe,” as a Chinese observer caustically argued.²⁸ It is no coincidence that states like Greece and Hungary diluted EU declarations on the maritime dispute in the South China Sea where

see Mohammed Ayoob in his concept of “subaltern realism” (Ayoob 20002)

24 The full text of the speech was published by China Daily, 17 February 2019.

25 Ibid

26 Foreign Minister Wang Yi in a speech opening the Symposium on “The International Situation and China’s Foreign Relations,” re-printed by the Thai News Service, 14 December 2018.

27 The National Herald, 13 April 2019.

28 China Daily, 12 October 2018.

many European and Asian governments see China operating outside the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).²⁹ The 16+1 Forum resembles the shallow hybrid-type interregional fora such as the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC), the China-Arab States Cooperation Forum (CASCF) and the Forum of China and the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) that China has established with other world regions. Typical examples of forum shopping are the formation of the BRICS New Development Bank Asian Infrastructure and the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB), which the US government and many Western observers, irrespective of emerging cooperative ties, regard as challenges to the rule-setting capacity of Western-dominated IFIs such as the IMF, the World Bank and regional development banks such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), in which Japan has a major stake. Yet this should not conceal the fact that the EU also has its due share in forum shopping: the numerous bilateral hybrid interregional relationships, designated as “strategic partnerships” (Drechsel 2015), it has established with China, India, Russia, Japan, ASEAN and others exhibit a considerable amount of institutional overlap with ASEM.

The multilateralism that China and many Asian countries champion is not only a shallow and hence “diminished” multilateralism, but also a “selective” multilateralism: multilateralism is promoted where it serves its adherents. Even the EU – despite pronouncements in favor of a robust multilateralism – supports the selective promotion of multilateralism; at least in the ASEM context. Given the fact that China and the EU regard themselves as the greatest victims of US President Trump’s uni-

lateral trade policies,³⁰ it is hardly surprising that they prioritize the retention of WTO-driven trade multilateralism over other multilateral policy fora. Both strongly and persistently emphasize the significance of the WTO for an open world economy and as a defense against Washington’s protectionist trade policies. While European and Asian members of ASEM seek to protect global trade multilateralism, they also agree that the WTO needs reform, although details remain vague.

Beyond the common call for retaining and reforming the WTO, major disagreements in the domain of trade policies persist. The EU has so far not accorded “market-economy” status to China, which would relieve it from anti-dumping pressures on low-cost exports, and it shares a litany of American concerns: access for European firms to the Chinese market, forced technology transfers for European investors in China, rampant Chinese acquisitions of technology-intensive companies in Europe as a move to facilitate its “Made in China 2025” strategy, poor intellectual property protection, state subsidies for Chinese companies, currency manipulation and industrial espionage.³¹ The acrimonies at the latest EU-China Summit testify to these disagreements.³² Although China vehemently denies these charges, the issues at hand show how difficult it is to agree on global trade rules. The limited trust of the EU towards China is reflected in the EU’s new China strategy adopted on 12 March 2019, which describes China as “a systemic rival” employing alternative management models and as an “economic competitor seeking technological leadership.”³³ Yet the

²⁹ Reuters, 15 July 2016.

³⁰ Global Times, 19 October 2018.

³¹ Euractiv, 8 September 2006; Fondation Robert Schuman, 29 May 2017; CGTN, 16 October 2018

³² Euractiv, 5 April 2019.

³³ Modern Diplomacy, 7 April 2019.

EU also only reluctantly gives up unfair trade practices affecting many developing countries such as agricultural subsidies and its strong role in the WTO's non-transparent mini-lateral decision-making process which also works to the detriment of developing countries. Given their inconsistent policies, which are guided by the desire to realize short-term gains, it cannot be excluded that in the end the EU as well as China may negotiate bilateral agreements with the US, which would further weaken WTO-based trade multilateralism.³⁴

ASEM also champions multilateralism in the environmental domain, strongly pleading for upholding the Paris Agreement on Climate Change which the US has left. But here, too, the track record of Europe and Asia is not persuasive. The EU as a self-declared trend-setter in environmental policies is far behind its targets for CO₂ reduction. In the wake of rapidly increasing air and water pollution, China and other Asian states have undertaken major steps towards a cleaner environment at home. However, while China is in the process of becoming a global leader in renewable energies including solar, wind and hydropower, neither China nor Japan have ceased exporting coal-fired power plants to neighboring countries (Zou & Zhang 2017). Although both claim that they export the latest carbon capture and storage technology, it is questionable whether the latter delivers what its adherents promise. Documents and scholarly accounts abound that show that environmental concerns are grossly neglected not only in Chinese BRI infrastructure projects, but also in competing Japanese, South Korean and Thai projects in the Asian region. Environmental impact assessments are either completely missing or based on the poor standards of the



Shanghai, China.

host countries.³⁵

Disagreements over international law and rule-based policies can also be found in the security domain. China's maritime claims in the South China Sea are not compatible with UNCLOS. Aided by Russia, which claimed the “West was hectoring,”³⁶ China did not accept the ruling of the International Court of Justice on the South China Sea in July 2016. During past ASEM Summits Beijing made clear that it did not want to see the issue on the summit agenda as it does not regard ASEM as the appropriate venue for discussing maritime disputes.³⁷ Furthermore, China vocally opposes any activity that under-

35 Inter alia, Phnom Penh Post, 24 November 2016; Myanmar Times, 4 September 2017; Earthrights International, “Don Sahong Dam,” available at: <https://earthrights.org/case/don-sahong-dam/> (accessed 28 November 2018); South China Morning Post, 16 August 2018.

36 Reuters, 16 July 2016.

37 Ibid.

34 East Asia Forum, 4 February 2019.



mines its sovereignty and security interests under the pretext of freedom of navigation and overflight, the position taken by the US and other Western countries³⁸ ASEM member Russia also, with its objective of creating a “post-Western world order” (Brunnée 2018: 337), its realpolitik-driven attitudes towards multilateralism (Utkin 2018), its annexation of the Crimea, its support of insurgents in eastern Ukraine, the downing of Malaysian airliner MH17 over eastern Ukraine in 2014 and the non-implementation of the Minsk agreement shows disregard for the UN norms of non-aggression and peaceful conflict settlement and make it a strange bedfellow for strengthening a multilateral global order.

Another area where Asian and European interests at first sight coincide is connectivity.

Infrastructure development as promoted by the BRI and the EU Asia-Europe Connectivity Scheme finalized in September 2018 may – if well-coordinated and sustainably implemented – accelerate trade between Asia and Europe, which already exceeds Trans-Pacific trade.³⁹ While the EU maintains that the European connectivity scheme and BRI are complementary, others are not so sure and rather view the European scheme as a competitive response to the BRI. At stake are norms of development policy, which differ markedly. While the Chinese concept claims to avoid conditionalities and other forms of intrusion into the sovereignty of host countries, with the effect that many projects are beset by severe environmental, economic and fiscal problems, the Europeans – similar to the Japanese with their concept of “Quality Infrastructure” – highlight “sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based connectivity” as well as connectivity based on “sound regulatory frameworks,” “fiscal responsibility” and “open-market rules,”⁴⁰ a thinly veiled allusion to the divergent views on the economic policies discussed above. The EU thus seeks to protect Western development policies as laid down by the Development Assistance Committee (DAC) of the Organization of Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), which the Chinese government disdains due to their sovereignty-curtailling nature and long gestation periods.⁴¹

Finally, ASEM-driven multilateralism – as ASEM itself – is “executive” multilateralism. It is dominated by governments and bureaucracies. Other stakeholders play a marginal role

38 China Daily, 17 February 2019.

39 Asia Times, 23 October 2018.

40 Ibid.

41 Statement by a Chinese scholar at a BRI conference in Brussels, 16 and 17 November 2018.

at best. The Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP), ASEM's parliamentary platform, has only symbolic value and is regarded as ineffective by European parliamentarians (Rüländ & Carrapatoso 2015: 209). Dialogue with civil society is outsourced to the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which organizes useful meetings, but with limited resources and dominated by diplomats it is hardly able to organize credible and institutionalized government-civil society interfaces. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang argued that there should be more exchanges between “our parliaments, social organizations, think tanks, universities and media outlets,” but the purpose of these interactions is in the first place the fostering of mutual “understanding and friendship between our peoples,”⁴² and not the debate of crucial themes shaping Asian and European relations. Rather than democratizing interregional relations, ASEM is a case of interregional corporatism.⁴³

Conclusion

This article has argued that the promotion of multilateralism by ASEM is welcome. ASEM's call for a multilateral global order at the ASEM 12 Summit has certainly increased the forum's relevance and stature and made it a rhetorical antipode to US President Trump's protectionist and unilateralist “America First” policies. Yet the article also shows that the common stance for multilateralism is fragile. European and Asian states differ markedly in their conceptualization of a multilateral global order. While the EU at least rhetorically seems to opt for a robust, “thick” and “principled” multilateralism based on liberal norms, many Asian states opt for what may be characterized

as a “diminished,” “selective” and “executive” multilateralism. As a large, 53-member forum, which acts on the basis of the lowest common denominator, the prospects are slim that ASEM's plea for multilateralism goes beyond a “thin” version of multilateralism. A pluralist “multiplex” order as favored by Acharya (2018) or the club-based institutional architecture proposed by Pisani-Ferry (2019) may chart ways for avoiding an international order based on the law of the jungle as preferred by irresponsible right-wing populists, but whether it contributes effectively to increasingly pressing global and regional cross-border problems remains to be seen and depends on whether proliferating “regime complexes” indeed stand for modernization-driven and problem-oriented specialization and differentiation of international institutions as expected by Zürn and Faude (2013).

“European and Asian states differ markedly in their conceptualization of a multilateral global order.”

Moreover, as ASEM itself is a typical example of “diminished” multilateralism, it cannot be a role model for a robust multilateral order. If it wishes to be such a role model, bolder institutional reforms will be required. In that case, ASEM must move beyond its non-binding, basically consultative format and must enter the realm of “hard law.” Binding decisions and reliably coordinating Asian-European policies in global fora – as demanded by the concept of “multilateral utility” – are likewise required. Its members must withstand the ubiquitous temptation of forum shopping and seriously engage in the existing structure of multilateral institutions.

With more ambitious functions and mandates, which credibly promoting a robust mul-

⁴² China Daily, 18 October 2018.

⁴³ On the concept of “regional corporatism,” see Rüländ (2014).

tilateral order would entail, ASEM must also professionalize and overcome its laundry

list-like programmatic work, which strongly depends on summit hosts. Therefore, the creation of a secretariat, deeper institutionalization and democratization in pursuit of the “most affected principle” are urgently needed for consistent policy generation and monitoring purposes. Yet diplomats from both regions are wary of such institutional reforms, which would undoubtedly weaken government influence on the agenda of ASEM.



Reading time: 9 minutes*

Prospects on Cambodia's Chairmanship of ASEM Summit 2020

Perspectives from Dr. Sok Siphana

Dr. Sok Siphana¹

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Dr. Sok was appointed by Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen to hold concurrently the position as Advisor of the Royal Government of Cambodia (RGC), as Advisor to the Supreme National Economic Council (SNEC), and as Advisor to the Council for Development of Cambodia (CDC) with rank of Minister in August 2009 and November 2011 respectively. In September 2018, he was reappointed as Senior Advisor to the Royal Government of Cambodia with rank of Senior Minister.

Previously from 1999 to 2005, Dr Sok served as Secretary of State at the Ministry of Commerce, where he worked extensively on issues related to trade policies and development, commercial legal framework and economic integration. During his service at the Ministry, he was also a negotiator in Cambodia's accession to the World Trade Organization (WTO). From October 2005 to July 2009 he served as Director at the International Trade Center (ITC) a joint technical agency of the UNCTAD and the WTO in Geneva, Switzerland.

From 2011 to March 2018, he served as the Chairman of the Board of Cambodia Development Resource Institute (CDRI), Cambodia's oldest and prominent independent research institute. From January 2019, he was elected to be the Chairman of the Board of the Asian Vision Institute, a newly established policy think tank in Cambodia. Dr. Sok is holder of a Juris Doctor (J.D.) from Widener University School of Law in Delaware, United States (1992) and a Ph.D. from Bond University School of Law in Queensland, Australia (2009). He is also currently pursuing a Ph.D. degree on Comparative Laws with the Université de Paris 2, Panthéon-Assas.

Introduction

I have the opportunity to follow the evolution of ASEM since 2011, a few years after my return from Geneva, when the Government requested me to advise the Ministry of Foreign Affairs on foreign policy matters. My first impression of ASEM back then was a bit disappointing and unpleasant. The text negotiation of the Chairman Statement for the 9th ASEM Summit in Vientiane, Lao PDR was confrontational and long drawn. We spent three days and one night to negotiate the text and we took turn to sleep. At one point I had to say something very harsh: “None of us will be able to receive our leaders when they arrived in the morning, if we could not clear the Statement.” Ultimately, we did finish on time by the early morning and the Summit went well. I must say that ASEM comes a long way since the Vientiane Summit in 2012 and we kept learning along the way about how to make ASEM more effective. We talked about streamlining and making ASEM more efficient. We convened a Bangkok symposium to that effect; we agreed on the “Bangkok Initiative on Future Direction of ASEM”, then we had the “Chongqing Initiative”; recently we drew a lot of lessons from the “EU study on ASEM in 20 years”. ASEM has been a long journey of learning and improvement and it will continue to be so in many decades to come.

By now ASEM’s value and importance in today’s politics, diplomacy, and inter-regional relations is uncontested, after playing a key role for more than two decades as a forum for dialogue and cooperation connecting Asia and Europe. Since its inception in 1996 ASEM has changed significantly to adapt itself to the fast transforming global environment marked by an increasingly multipolar world, and a progressively more interdependent Asian region.

Its membership has been enlarged substantially along with an expanding European Union. In terms of substance, the process is now covering much more ground, reflecting newly emerging global challenges that Asia and Europe need to tackle, some separately and some together. Moreover, ASEM has taken incremental steps to strengthen coordination and to translate its informal dialogue process into tangible outcomes and common policies.

ASEM Benefits

The question I have heard regularly from Cambodians from different walks of life is very simplistic. What is ASEM to Cambodia? What is it for us?

Cambodia has joined ASEM since the 5th ASEM Summit in 2004 in Vietnam because we value ASEM as an important forum for region-to-region cooperation that offers numerous benefits for Cambodia. After all, ASEM provides Cambodia an excellent venue to promote Cambodia’s image in the international arena. The recent Summit in Brussels was attended by the Heads of State and Government, or their high-level representatives, of 28 European Union states and 21 Asian countries, the President of the European Commission and the Secretary-General of ASEAN. That is an impressive gathering of leaders whose countries represent around 62.3 per cent of the world’s population, 57.2 per cent of the global GDP and almost 60 per cent of the world’s trade.

Our Prime Minister, Samdech Techo Hun Sen, has always placed a paramount importance on attending the ASEM Summits, from the very beginning starting with Hanoi, Helsinki, Beijing, Brussels, Vientiane, Milan, Ulaanbaatar, and Brussels. For him the relevancy of ASEM is obvious when it comes to oppor-



The photo shows the Win Win monument, which is a symbol of peace in Cambodia.

tunities for bilateral encounters and frank exchanges at the ASEM retreat sessions. I can say “relevancy at the high level” is there. I recalled when we were on the way back from Milan, the Prime Minister said to our delegation that “...we come all the way to Milan, we chartered a special flight to Hong Kong and then we flew on commercial flight with a big delegation and I got to deliver a speech at the plenary and the retreat for only eight minutes. But it is all at the bilateral meetings that I was able to speak frankly on many issues crucial for Cambodia, and I could say “Yes” it was well worth the trip.”

Why Host the ASEM Summit?

In fact, Samdech Techo Hun Sen placed a special interest to hosting the Summit one day when the occasion arises. That is why, at the last Summit in Brussels, he officially announced Cambodia's offer to host the Summit. The announcement was very much appreciated and welcomed by all ASEM Leaders. Why did he decide to offer hosting the 13th

ASEM Summit in Cambodia in 2020?

Hosting the ASEM Summit is on a voluntary basis and it takes turn every two years between Asia and Europe. It's quite an ambitious task to host such a huge Summit, with the participation of 53 Leaders. It will definitely require a lot of resources to cope with the organizational challenges, i.e. budgetary resources, human resources, technical support, physical facilities, high level protocol and utmost security details, etc.

Admittedly, with all these efforts, Cambodia will gain a lot in return as well. This Summit will become the biggest historical event ever to be held in Cambodia's contemporary history. It will bring great honour and recognition for our nation indeed. Obviously, we had organised successfully in the past many regional and sub-regional Summits, such as the ASEAN Summits in 2002 and 2012, but they were not as huge as compared to this ASEM Summit. The maximum was 27 countries, here I mean at the top leaders' level.

More importantly, hosting the Summit is an excellent opportunity to assert Cambodia's role at its highest level of involvement in the international arena. It demonstrates our country's active engagement in the ASEM framework on the basis of equal partnership with all its members. It will also reflect Cambodia's continued commitment through the ASEM process to address today's global challenges and to seek opportunities to further strengthen dialogue and cooperation among ASEM partners and beyond.

Why Host other ASEM Related Events?

Enhancing visibility and awareness of ASEM is extremely important so as to promote a better understanding of what ASEM is and does. The same idea goes with the need to improve the quality of ASEM's public profile in relation to all the ASEM stakeholders. Whether they are coming from parliaments, civil society groups, media, youth and women, business and academic communities, all of their inputs can help support and promote the ASEM agenda.

As the host country, Cambodia has planned to organise seven side events, which are traditional practices of the ASEM process, namely: (1) the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting; (2) the Asia-Europe Economic and Business Forum; (3) the ASEM Young Leaders Summit; (4) the ASEM Editors' Roundtable; (5) the Asia-Europe Labour Forum; (6) the Asia-Europe People's Forum, and (7) the ASEM Cultural Festival.

Of the seven events, the "Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting" will be the other high profile ASEM event which will

bring together parliamentarians from all the 51 countries. The "Asia-Europe Economic and Business Forum" will further strengthen private sector participation to deepen business-to-business cooperation, with a special focus on small-and-medium enterprises between the two continents. In the past, there was an opportunity to have a representative of the business summit to present the business sector's recommendations directly to the Leaders at the summit. The ASEM Young Leaders Summit, in addition, will further empower the role and participation of young people through a "model ASEM".

Moreover, the exciting flagship event that will catch the attention of the ASEM delegates will probably be the memorable "ASEM Cultural Festival". Last year, in conjunction with the 12th ASEM Summit in Brussels, the "ASEM Cultural Festival" was launched under the theme "Europe meets Asia, Asia meets Europe". For its part, Cambodia will seize the occasion to promote this event as its "Cultural Diplomacy". There is no doubt that cultural diplomacy and cultural cooperation can act as an engine for social and economic development, especially by fostering cooperation amongst European cities and Asian cities, which are all so rich in cultures. I am quite certain that Cambodia will organise magnificent and breathtaking events in Siem Reap, where ASEM delegates can appreciate our ancient civilisation through the marvels of the Angkor Wat Temples Complex, and the richness of our Cambodian culture intertwined in an inter-cultural dialogue among other ASEM partners. For me, the thought of this is in itself exciting. I look forward to enjoying the moment at that ASEM Cultural Festival.

What Lies Ahead Leading to the ASEM Summit?

A lot of things are happening in the world now and will continue to unravel to the time of the next Summit in Cambodia. The world economy still faces growing uncertainties and destabilizing factors. On the European side, the European parliamentary elections will see some new leadership team at the helm. Europe still has yet to feel the possible fallout of Britain's exit from the European Union. The problem of refugees and illegal migrants are getting thorny. A host of other more worrisome challenges like terrorism and violent extremism are more deadly than ever.

Worse yet the US-China trade war and their battle for supremacy on high tech has just begun and smaller economies that are relying on trade with either one or both of these super powers are really worried. The global and regional supply chains will for sure be affected, but to what extent we don't know yet. How will they affect these countries' aspiration to ride the trends of the Fourth Industrial Revolution, the picture is not clear yet. When trade shrinks, we are less prosperous and less generous. Then, how will we finance the high cost of our ambitious climate change adaptation programs and the SDGs? Still a lot of question marks.

But not all is doom and gloom. When there is a risk, there is also an opportunity. As the world undergoes complex changes with profound adjustments in the global economy and the reconfiguration of international order, opportunities will also arise. A new wave of scientific and technological and industrial revolutions is gaining momentum as new technologies, industries and models keep emerging. New sources of growth will emerge. More

economic cooperation will be intensified to keep pace with the times and adapt to the changing trend. The connectivity momentum shows no signs of slowdown. Most European countries are leading in this technological breakthrough. But on the Asian side, we are thriving and have ample financial resources to invest. Together Asian and European partnership opportunities abound.

These are issues for the Asian and European leaders to deliberate. ASEM is a safe place to discuss "unsafe and challenging ideas". The main principles of ASEM - informality, flexibility, mutual respect in the spirit of consensus, equal partnership and mutual benefit - are all the more conducive for these spontaneous exchanges. In the past, crisis have brought Leaders together in very unexpected ways. I recall the ASEM Summit in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia. The focus of the Leaders' discussions was shaped by the Nice terrorism attack the night before. A day earlier, the ASEM SOM stayed up until three o'clock in the morning to negotiate the Chair Statement until the projector burned, and we did not agree on Japan's stand-alone Statement on Terrorism... until the news of the Nice attack the next morning. Needless to say, everybody reached consensus to issue the stand-alone statement.

So I believe ASEM Leaders will be happy to join in frank discussions in the Retreat session, which will offer them a good mechanism to settle "highly conflictual issues" of global and regional pertinence. Moreover, ASEM is a place where they can improve both multi and bilateral relations among themselves. It is a catalyst for pushing deeper connection and inter-dependence between Asia and Europe. In the context of uncertain political changes brought about by protectionism and a reversal globalization by the U.S. and given the

growing importance of Asia to Europe and vice versa, the Leaders will use this important, relevant and useful platform to engage to bring the globalization back on track. There is always the flip side of a coin – the next ASEM Summit here in Cambodia could be the silver lining.

What Does Cambodia Expect From the ASEM Summit?

As host and co-chair with the European Union, Cambodia hopes to have a visionary “Phnom Penh Declaration” that will project ASEM’s narrative of relevance in the 21st century, a compelling vision of a thriving well-connected Asia-Europe marketplace. We don’t have yet a theme for the Summit at this point. It is expected that H.E. Prak Sokhonn, Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, will announce it at the upcoming 14th ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in December of this year in Spain. Indeed, the theme will reflect the common aspiration of all ASEM members to stay true to their mission of building a strong, vibrant and comprehensive partnership as ASEM looks ahead to the next decade of its existence.

Given the content of the Chair’s statement, Cambodia is of the view of having a short, concise, balanced, consensus based, more focused and reflective on “issues that bind rather those that divide”, and we should refrain from issues which do not provide direct benefits to both Asia and Europe.

As a full-fledged active member of ASEAN, we want to highlight the ASEM’s relevance to ASEAN and vice versa. We will have the opportunity to update ASEM Leaders on the outcomes of our ASEAN Summits as well, which by the way will be chaired by Vietnam in 2020. We

will stress ASEAN’s endeavours in expanding its relations with European ASEM partners in furthering engagement with the region through most of our ASEAN-led processes.

ASEM is another opportunity for add fresh impetus to Asia-Europe cooperation at the country-to-country level. To secure new sources of economic growth - product wise, country wise, Cambodia needs to pursue vigorously the “Connectivity” dimension because if we are to deliver on the vision of our Prime Minister Samdech Techo Hun Sen of getting Cambodia to become a middle-income country by 2030, we won’t be able to do it without a strong connectivity linkage. For us, connectivity is an enabler – for development, for improving the quality of life of people, for encouraging greater people-to-people exchanges, for stimulating trade and investments, and indeed for building peace, stability and security. In Cambodia and in the Mekong region, China’s “Belt and Road” Initiative and Japan’s “Quality Infrastructure” are complementing each other.

That is why we need to draw maximum benefit from the recent works of ASEM Pathfinder Group on Connectivity (APGC). We should draw the lessons learned from the APGC’s two years’ worth of productive exchanges as to what constitute a good Connectivity infrastructure projects, i.e. the needs to stress the importance of sustainability and to be in conformity with international standards including open and fair access, economic efficiency in view of life-cycle cost, safety, resilience against natural disaster, job creation, capacity building, social and environmental consideration, alignment with economic and development strategies as a quality benchmark, and make the link with the implementation of the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). That is a lot to chew, I know, but that is what a good

Connectivity project should be.

As host of the Summit, Cambodia has to work with other like-minded nations to explore areas in which ASEM can make a difference or to put in another way "ASEM added value". As much as ASEM can only function as an incubator for the so-called hard connectivity, private sector cooperation would be the propeller and cornerstone for developing these inter-continental business and investment partnerships. In my view, ASEM, designed mainly as a mechanism for informal dialogue, can take on a more practical dimension in its cooperation, in particular in trade and investment, or in quality infrastructure to achieve sustainable growth, to mention just a few areas.

So far there is a perceived gap between those emphasizing the informal dialogue process, and those seeking to increase concrete joint endeavours. I guess we don't have to choose either one. We can still do both. That is the beauty of ASEM. We can be very macro in term of global high level policy cooperation like tackling climate change and making multilateralism more effective. Yet, at the same time we can be so micro as to what we consider connectivity should be like. All, too often, some tension exists between high expectations and ASEM's limited capabilities. Perhaps promoting or making optimal use of a "Variable Geometry ASEM" through issue-based leadership could enhance the effectiveness of tangible cooperation? How about enhancing more sectoral engagement and dialogue. Leaders have already noted with appreciation the outcomes of various ASEM Ministerial meetings in the areas of Foreign Affairs, Economy, Transport, Education, Culture and Finance. All these efforts taken together clearly demonstrate the important added value that the ASEM framework brings.

Building the Foundation of the Future of ASEM

Here I see clearly the role of the "Asia-Europe Foundation" in empowering the role of young people, women and girls in contributing to sustainable development. ASEF works in the past have produced gratifying results with their vast programs and activities in the educational, cultural and social fields. The role that various stakeholders can play in pursuing social and economic inclusion, sustainable societies and people-centred development is extremely important for the future of a "socially relevant ASEM".

In conclusion, I would stress that ASEM's inherent strengths – in the diversity of its membership, the complementarity of its capacities and resources, the commitment of its political leadership and the strength of its economies, are ground for great optimism. As we look ahead, to the next Summit in Cambodia and the next decade, it is incumbent upon us to ensure that ASEM remains a responsible and positive forum. With vision, ambition and action, Cambodia will work with other ASEM members to actively advance long-term cooperation between Asia and Europe so as to bring more benefits to the people and make even greater contribution to peace, stability, prosperity and development of the world.



Reading time: 24 minutes*

ASEM in the Eyes of Cambodia: A Key Diplomatic Option for Her Future Global and Regional Integration

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Introduction

Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) since its inception has been viewed as a non-binding platform for not only fostering soft and hard connectivity between Asia and Europe but also enhancing relationship and cooperation in both continents for the spirit of equal partnership and mutual interests. For the last 20 years, ASEM has, through its various informal dialogues, contributed to sharing policies conducive to addressing common global, international and regional challenges. Nevertheless, many observers note that it so far has yet to produce any tangible outcomes but a talk shop.

Since becoming an ASEM member in 2004, Cambodia is always active in attending all relevant ASEM meetings/events, including summits, foreign ministers' meetings, and other ministerial meetings just to name a few by devoting her own time, financial and human resources, even though concrete outcomes from this proactive engagement is yet to be seen. Notably, Cambodia has been honoured to host the 13th ASEM Summit in 2020. Therefore, this article is to seek answers to a pertinent question, "How does ASEM fit Cambodia's foreign policy?". To achieve this end, the article will cover three key aspects: Overview of ASEM characteristics and its roles, Cambodia's engagement in its process and how it fits the kingdom's foreign policy.³

The study contends that ASEM fits well into Cambodia's current foreign policy thanks largely to its characteristics and roles. More importantly, ASEM is compellingly regarded as an excellent venue to raise Cambodia's image in the international arena, to enhance her bilateral cooperation with other member states, to develop human resource, and to

provide vibrant connection linking Cambodia to other member states in both regions. It enables the kingdom to attain her foreign policy objectives of protection of national interests, sovereignty and independence, as well as of further integration into global and regional contexts.

Overview of ASEM Characteristics and its Roles

ASEM was created in March 1996 in Thailand with initial 26 partners, including 15 EU member states, the European Commission and 10 Asian countries, with the reciprocal recognition of inter-dependence and rapid development growth in both Asia and Europe. As a platform for cooperation between countries in Asia and Europe, ASEM is characterised as an informal and non-binding dialogue process for leaders from both continents to frankly discuss and share views on regional and global issues ranging from climate change to the complex matter of terrorism and radicalisation. Its core objectives are to strengthen partnership, promote peace and security and to enhance sustainable socio-economic development between the two regions and beyond with a main focus on three pillars of political, economic and socio-cultural aspects. The four utmost unique characteristics of ASEM encompass informality, multi-dimensionality, emphasis on equal partnership and dual focus on high-level and people to people.³

One of the most noticeable outcomes of ASEM is its enlargement from 26 (1996) to 53 members at the present time, of which 31 from Europe and 22 from Asia. This enables ASEM to be one of the largest inter-regional

3 ASEM InfoBoard, "Fostering Dialogue & Cooperation between Asia & Europe," ASEM InfoBoard, 2019, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/about/overview>.

fora in the world, representing around 65% of the global economy, 60% of world population, 55% of world trade and 75% of global tourism.⁴

Many scholars and diplomats have expressed divergent views of the roles of ASEM, ranging from colloquial dialogue to a dynamic connection between Asia and Europe. On one hand, ASEM has generally been viewed as the informal process of dialogues and cooperation among 53 members. For instance, prior to the ASEM-11 in Mongolia in 2016, Swiss Federal Councillor Didier Burkhalter and Foreign Minister of Mongolia Lundeg Purevsuren shared their common view that ASEM had been an essential forum for various stakeholders to join and shape the process of globalisation and a process on which we all can take action. They emphasised the significance of these meetings that helped to strengthen relations between partner countries, and to progress on issues of common interest.⁵

ASEM also plays a crucial role in creating opportunities for exchanging experiences and knowledge between Asia and Europe, as well as helping to build a common understanding of international and regional issues. Before the commencement of the ASEM-12 in Brussels in 2018, director of policy at the Friends of Europe Shada Islam emphasised that ASEM was a platform for achieving some issues of common interest through improved channels of communication, provision of global public goods, better governance and wider engagement of civil society. She contended that ASEM Summit should be built as a platform where Europe and Asia can

work together to reform and modernise the World Trade Organisation (WTO), to enhance connectivity and to expand their security dialogues. These security dialogues cover a wide range of security issues that both regions are likely to encounter. They include hybrid threats, cooperative security, regional approaches to peacemaking, preventive diplomacy and crisis management.⁶

To obtain tangible results from this forum, many diplomats and specialists from both regions recommend that the future of ASEM focus on connectivity. Though physical connectivity is not a great deal in Europe, it is the case in point in Asia. There have not been many initiatives that support the infrastructure development in this region, except that of China's Belt and Road initiative. Therefore, building connectivity (both hard and soft) is pivotal. Chinese Ambassador Zhang Xiaokang, Chinese Ambassador-at-Large in charge of the European Affairs, underlined the need for the establishment of a working group on connectivity, emphasising that this channel could embrace all stakeholders in the ASEM process. Similarly, Henrik Hololei, European Commission Deputy Secretary, stated that ASEM had presented an opportunity to tap into Asia's high-growth economies, and one of the pragmatic ways to foster solid partnership might be through connectivity.⁷

In short, ASEM is a dialogue platform necessary for enhancing cooperation, fostering relations, establishing Asia-Europe connection

4 ASEM InfoBoard, "ASEM in Numbers," ASEM InfoBoard, 2019, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/>.

5 Didier Burkhalter and Lundeg Purevsuren, "20 years of ASEM: An important link between Asia and Europe," March 1, 2016, <https://www.letemps.ch/opinions/vingt-ans-dasem-un-trait-dunion-important-entre-lasie-leurope>.

6 Shada Islam, "The Show Must Go on: ASEM Summit Is Test of Europe-Asia Working Together," Friends of Europe, October 2, 2018, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/publication/show-must-go-asem-summit-test-europe-asia-working-together-shada-islam>.

7 Friends of Europe, "ASEM AT 20 - The Challenge of Connectivity," September 9, 2015, <https://www.friendsofeurope.org/event/asem-20-challenge-connectivity>.

and engaging stakeholders in its process for mutual benefits of the two regions. Its members may be able to take advantages of this mechanism for their respective national interests through their involvements and commitment to partnership under its framework. To attain more practical outcomes from this regional cooperation, the ASEM countries are expected to focus on multi-layered connectivity.

However, contribution and engagement by ASEM participating countries vary depending on their levels of commitment, resources at disposal and political willingness in the ASEM process. This study sheds light on Cambodia's dynamic engagement in this process, and explores underlying reasons for her active involvement.

Cambodia's Engagement in the ASEM Process

Having seen the importance of inter-continental cooperation, Cambodia decided to join this platform on the occasion of the 5th ASEM Summit in Hanoi on 08 October 2004. This was the first round of ASEM enlargement in which 14 new members — 3 from Asia and 11 from Europe — started their engagement in the ASEM process. Though ASEM is just an informal dialogue, Cambodia has allocated significant resources for her engagement in the process.

The Kingdom will host the 13th ASEM Summit in 2020 and seven other side events in conjunction with this Summit. Those events include Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting, ASEM Cultural Festival, Asia-Europe Economic and Business Forum, ASEM Young Leader Summit, ASEM Editors'

Roundtable, Asia-Europe Labour Forum and Asia-Europe People's Forum.

Even though the 2020 ASEM summit and its related events require Cambodia to struggle on several fronts ranging from human resource, finance, technical expertise, physical infrastructure to diplomatic protocol and comprehensive security arrangements for leaders from both regions, the Kingdom has shown her strong commitment to the success of the aforementioned event. Chairing this Summit would be a new historical milestone for Cambodia, for it helps to boost her image in the international arena after her bitter experience of the civil war for almost 30 years. Such a commitment is clearly evidenced by the following remark of Prime Minister Hun Sen at the 12th ASEM Summit in Belgium last year: "Cambodia is committed to ensuring a successful summit".⁸ Thus, the pertinent question being raised here is —why has Cambodia been so dedicated to this process, in spite of its informal and non-binding nature of the forum.

How ASEM Fits Cambodia's Foreign Policy

The world has rapidly evolved and become more unpredictable, significantly affecting global cooperation, security and stability. The withdrawal of the United States from Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and from Iran Nuclear Deal, the rising populism and protectionism, US-Sino trade war, the launch of Indo Pacific Strategy, and Trump-Kim Summits are some examples of the evolving events the world has experienced thus far. The global uncertainty

⁸ Khmer Times, "Cambodia to Benefit by Hosting 2020 ASEM," Khmer Times (blog), March 11, 2019, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/50585851/cambodia-to-benefit-by-hosting-2020-asem/>.

and unpredictability as well as the geopolitical rivalry have exposed Cambodia to an awkward position in implementing her grand foreign policy strategy.

Against the above backdrop, Cambodia resorts to engage in more secure global and regional platforms in a bid to safeguard her national interests, sovereignty, enduring peace and economic prosperity. In this aspect, ASEM is an ideal option for Cambodia given its characteristics, roles and objectives. ASEM fits well into Cambodia's current foreign policy objectives of protecting the national interests, securing sovereignty, maintaining independence and peace, further integrating into regional and global arena, as well as raising Cambodia's image and prestige globally. The following will illustrate how the ASEM process fits in Cambodia's modern foreign policy.

Protection of National Interest, Specifically National Sovereignty and Independence

Safeguarding national sovereignty and independence is the foremost core priority for Cambodia's current foreign policy. The Kingdom's top concern is the repetition of her past bitter experiences during the Cold War, during which the country was utterly dragged into the political and ideological rivalries among superpowers. These rivalries resulted in the chronic civil wars that claimed millions of lives of Cambodian innocent people, especially during the Khmer Rouge regime from 1975 to 1979.

To realise this objective and to struggle for long-term survival, Cambodia has coherently embraced six foreign policy principles, as enshrined in Article 51&53

of the 1993 constitution, which include unequivocal neutrality and non-alignment, non-interference into domestic affairs of other states, non-military alliances, peaceful co-existence, non-foreign military bases and rights to receive military aid from others.⁹ Cambodia is open and friendly to all countries and regions around the world, and is committed to building friendship and partnership with them based on the principles of mutual respect and reciprocal benefits.

In order to enhance friendship and closer cooperation with ASEM member states, Cambodian leaders, including His Majesty King Norodom Sihamoni, head of government and foreign minister, have, over the last few years, increased a number of official visits to different ASEM countries such as Japan, China, India, Indonesia, Vietnam, Turkey, Hungary and Romania. In addition, Cambodian leaders have actively attended international and regional meetings and programs with other ASEM member state leaders so as to maintain and promote cooperation with the latter group in all fields.

Those activities have earned the Kingdom's higher degree of political trust and multifaceted cooperation from the ASEM countries.

For example, during an official visit by Cambodian Prime Minister to India on 25-27 January 2018, Cambodia was able to sign four official documents with her Indian counterpart, covering the aspects of human trafficking prevention, reciprocal legal assistance, culture program and provision of Indian concession loan for the water resource development project in Cambodia. Similarly,

⁹ The Constitution of the Kingdom of Cambodia, "Cambodia Constitution" (Constitutional Council, September 21, 1993).



The photo shows the Mekong river that 70 million people rely on for drinking water, food, irrigation, hydropower, transportation and commerce.

during another official visit of Cambodian Prime Minister to Turkey on 20-22 October 2018, both Cambodia and Turkey signed nine agreements to further enhance bilateral cooperation in the spheres of tourism, economy, agriculture, de-mining, diplomatic institute, education, sports, water resources and investment protection.¹⁰

Some observers argue that Cambodia is tilting toward China, and turning her back against Western countries, the U.S in particular. This argument does not totally hold, as it has overlooked the core objectives of Cambodia's foreign policy as enshrined in her Constitution's article 51 and 53. Those observers have neglected Cambodia's great efforts to mitigate her dependency on foreign aid through the introduction of various economic reforms and active engagement with global and regional institutions like the United Nations, WTO,

Mekong-Lancang cooperation, Mekong-Japan cooperation, Ayeyawady-Chao Phraya-Mekong Economic Cooperation Strategy (ACMECS), Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD), and ASEM.

Although Cambodia and the U.S have some different views about democracy and human rights situation in the Kingdom, Cambodia has still maintained good ties with the latter in order to promote regional peace, trade and economic growth. Both countries have still benefited from their cooperation in the fields of military, trade and investment, mine clearance, education and cultures. On 19 March 2019, both countries signed a bilateral military cooperation agreement for two-year period (2019-2020), aiming at strengthening ties in humanitarian affairs, education and military trainings.¹¹ Moreover, at the 5th coalition council meeting on the Trade and Investment Framework Agreement between

¹⁰ Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, "2018 Annual Outcomes and Ways Forward Report" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, March 1, 2019).

¹¹ Phnom Penh Post, "Cambodia Strengthens Military Ties with the US," March 21, 2019, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/cambodia-strengthens-military-ties-us>.

Cambodia and the US in January 2019, Cambodian Minister of Commerce said that both countries' trade volume in 2018 rose up to more than US\$ three billion, 27 per cent increase compared to that in 2017. The US is still Cambodia's second largest market. Cambodia's export to the U.S reached US\$2.88 billion, whereas her import from the latter valued at \$426 million.¹² In terms of the cultural cooperation, Cambodia received a grant of US\$ 200,000 from the U.S for the conservation of the ancient Preah Vihear temple's ladders.¹³

ASEM is also an important platform for Cambodia to make more friends and extend more cooperation with other state members based on reciprocal respect and mutual interests. The past experiences of civil wars and foreign meddling in the Kingdom's internal affairs have haunted Cambodia. Hence, it has become very cautious about her foreign policy implementation so as not to repeat the past catastrophe. The best lessons learnt from her contemporary history were that some foreign countries were aimed at interfering into the Kingdom's internal affairs through their divide-and-conquer policy, support of different factions and the provocation of internal conflicts. Such an interference led to the various regime changes and government's failure to obtain legitimacy and international recognition from 1970 to 1998.

“ASEM is also an important platform for Cambodia to make more friends and extend more

cooperation with other state members based on reciprocal respect and mutual interests.”

In short, Cambodia has steadfastly upheld the six core principles of her foreign policy, while, at the same time, remaining open for more friendship and committing to deepening cooperation with all countries around the world so long as they respect her sovereignty and absolute independence. Owing to the bitter experience of foreign meddling, Cambodia is always cautious of making foreign policy options, especially when coming to term with major powers. Cambodia consistently made it clear that she would never exchange her sovereignty for any foreign aid. The Kingdom is doing her best to integrate herself into global and regional frameworks aiming at avoiding foreign intrusion, and fostering economic cooperation and friendship with more countries. ASEM is, of course, one of the ideal platforms, whereby Cambodia can harness in order to realise this objective.

Flexible Diplomacy in Response to the Potential Geopolitical Rivalry Among the Great Powers

Today, global uncertainties have been mainly driven by geopolitical rivalries between the existing and revisionist powers. This has, at times, put Cambodia in a very awkward position. The Kingdom is required to have a balanced foreign policy. Concretely, her foreign policy should be flexible, smart, and responsive to the dramatic shifts of the geopolitical competition among the great powers. Nonetheless, the Kingdom has to consistently embrace the principle of peaceful neutrality and non-alignment. By so doing, the peace and stability will prevail.

12 Phnom Penh Post, “Trade between US and Cambodia Rises 27 per Cent on Previous Year,” Phnom Penh Post, January 30, 2019, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/business/trade-between-us-and-cambodia-rises-27-cent-previous-year>.

13 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, “2018 Annual Outcomes and Ways Forward Report.”

Domestic policy and foreign policy are indeed complementary and interconnected in nature. Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn once said:

We are implementing the government motto – making internal reforms and increasing external friendship with the aim of strengthening the independence and national sovereignty. We continue to extend our external relations and diplomatic activities to strengthen and increase friendship and cooperation with countries around the world in order to further our interests and national prestige”. Cambodia needs to create new markets and incentives for an influx of investment.¹⁴

In this respect, Cambodia keeps diversifying her foreign relations to make more friends and increase cooperation in all fields with all countries, including all powers, not just with any particular power.

To ward off external threat to her security and peace, Cambodia has done her utmost in making substantial reforms, including but not limited to human resources development. At Cambodia’s Foreign Ministry, in order to effectively connect the Kingdom with the outside world, continuous capacity building programs have been developed and provided to all Cambodian diplomats in the areas of diplomacy and strategic analysis. Specifically, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation established the National Institute for Diplomacy and International Relations (NIDIR) in 2016 in order to equip Cambodian diplomats with diplomatic, administrative, analytical and soft skills, crucial to their

daily work. In this connection, ASEM has substantially contributed to Cambodia’s human resources development of both public and private institutions through its assistance with seminars, workshops, trainings, dialogues and other related activities of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). Cambodia has kept sending her delegates to take part in ASEF projects pertaining to intellectual exchange, cultural exchange, people-to-people exchange and public affairs. Further, the Kingdom has joined activities of ASEM education centres so as to promote her cooperation with ASEM in the higher education sector. In 2019, Cambodia will organise two training courses on Asia-Europe diplomacy and the 8th Asia-Europe Summit on Sustainable Development Dialogue under the theme of Promoting Maritime Partnership for Growth and Sustainable Development.

Promotion of Economic, Commercial, Cultural and Tourism Diplomacy through Cambodia’s Economic Diversification

Economic pragmatism is one of the key elements in shaping Cambodia’s foreign policy strategy. Cambodia has strived to transform her traditional politics-driven foreign policy into economic-driven one through two main approaches — diversification of strategic partnerships and the unleashing of potentials of regional integration. Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn stressed that Cambodia’s modern diplomacy had attached her great importance to economy, tourism and culture in response to the current context of the today world. To carry out modern diplomacy, Cambodia has moved forward to attract foreign investors and tourists, as well as to promote Khmer culture to the international arena. To reap economic benefits from regional integration, Cambodia

¹⁴ Phnom Penh Post, “Foreign Affairs Minister Lays Out Core Foreign Policy Values,” Phnom Penh Post, March 12, 2019, <https://www.phnompenhpost.com/national/foreign-affairs-minister-lays-out-core-foreign-policy-values>.

is expected to accelerate people-oriented and people-centred regional community building.¹⁵ This expectation coincides with an ASEM's key characteristic, which mentions about connectivity projects, especially people-to-people one. In this regard, he underscored that Cambodia "has benefited a lot from ASEM in terms of economy, development, human capacity building, trade, tourism, people-to-people exchange".¹⁶

"To reap economic benefits from regional integration, Cambodia is expected to accelerate people-oriented and people-centred regional community building."

In the wake of Khmer Rouge regime which killed more than one fifth of its 7 million population from 1975 to 1979, Cambodia strongly relied on emergency relief, foreign support and development assistance provided by international community. Nevertheless, the above situation has gradually changed after the end of the civil war in 1998. The kingdom, in addition to foreign assistance, also had other means at her disposal to support her sustainable economic development and long-term survival. Cambodia decided to integrate itself into regional and global institutions such as ASEAN and WTO in 1999 and 2004, respectively.¹⁷ This integration has encouraged the Kingdom to open her market

and introduce macroeconomic policies conducive to trade, investment, and inflow of FDIs in order to attract more investment and enhance its fragile economy.¹⁸

To further integrate into international mechanisms for more economic benefits and further prestige, the Kingdom decided to join ASEM in 2004. Ever since, it has been active in the ASEM process by frequently organising a series of events to promote awareness of the ASEM process and its related events. For example, Cambodia has, since 2017, organised a series of public lectures on ASEM Day with the total participation of about 2,000 students.

During the ASEM day 2019, Foreign Minister Prak Sokkhonn laid out four core foreign policy values that Cambodia needs to focus on in the current global context, one of which was the increase of trade, economic and cultural diplomacy so as to absorb more sources of economic growth through diversification.¹⁹ In this regard, ASEM is the best option for Cambodia to realise this objective since ASEM comprises 51 countries, representing 55% of world trade and 75% of global tourism.²⁰

It is an ideal place for strengthening bilateral cooperation with other members. Typically, on the sidelines of ASEM high-level meetings such as the ASEM Summit and Foreign Ministers' Meeting, Cambodia organises bilateral meetings with other members to boost cooperation and development in the

15 Chheang Vannarith, "Economic Pragmatism in Cambodia's Foreign Policy," Khmer Times (blog), July 16, 2018, <https://www.khmertimeskh.com/511996/economic-pragmatism-in-cambodias-foreign-policy/>.

16 Cambodia News Gazette, "Cambodian Top Diplomat Reaffirms Cambodia's Commitment to Host 13th ASEM Summit," March 11, 2019, <https://cambodiannewsgazette.com/cambodian-top-diplomat-reaffirms-cambodias-commitment-to-host-13th-asem-summit/>.

17 Prak Sokkhonn, "Understanding Current Situation in the World and Cambodia's Foreign Policy," Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation (blog), September 14, 2017, <https://www.mfaic.gov.kh/site/detail/13587>.

18 Hil Hall and Jayant Menon, "Cambodia: Rapid Growth in an Open, Post-Conflict Economy," Australian National University, no. 2014/12 (May 2014).

19 Phnom Penh Post, "Foreign Affairs Minister Lays Out Core Foreign Policy Values."

20 ASEM InfoBoard, "ASEM in Numbers."

spheres of agriculture, trade, investment and tourism.

Another most important aspect that ASEM may fit well into Cambodia's foreign policy is the promotion of connectivity initiatives between the two continents. At the 11th ASEM Summit held in Ulaanbaatar in 2016 under the theme of 20 Years of ASEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity, all ASEM member leaders, including Cambodia's, spelled out their commitment to leading ASEM successfully into its third decade through reinforcing their partnerships, focusing cooperation for tangible benefits, fostering connectivity in all dimensions and promoting informality, networking and flexibility. They reiterated "strong resolve to work together to energise ASEM, promote further connectivity, mutually beneficial partnership and cooperation between Asia and Europe".²¹

Regarding the connectivity enhancement, the Cambodian foreign minister also stressed on the utmost importance of ASEM connectivity for Cambodia's future economic cooperation, security and deeper integration into the global and regional platforms. He stated that ASEM's infrastructure, institutions and people-to-people connectivity initiatives not only strengthened the strength of the two regions, but also provided another momentum for sustainable development and growth in the world. He pointed out that ASEM might be able to create value-added cooperation through concrete plans over this connectivity projects. To maximise benefits from ASEM connectivity, he also recommended to strengthen the security system to prevent risks arising from

those kinds of connection such as infectious diseases, terrorism, transnational crimes and so on²² In this regard, China's Belt and Road Initiative and ASEAN Master Plan on Connectivity are some crucial regional cooperation mechanisms that Cambodia may reap the benefits from the Asia-Europe linkage.²³

Contribution to Active Participation in Maintaining Peace and Addressing Global Challenges

Another foreign policy objective Cambodia is striving to achieve is to become a global peace builder based on the principle of equal footing and same rights as other nations.²⁴ To achieve this end, the Kingdom is expected to consistently make her great efforts in promoting the country profile and prestige regionally and internationally through her active engagement in peacebuilding activities. For instance, Cambodia, which used to be a war-torn country and to receive UN peacekeeping forces during 1992-1993, has now become one of the most active ASEAN countries, which have regularly contributed peacekeeping forces to the UN peacekeeping missions. Since 2006, Cambodia has sent nearly 6000 troops to eight countries in the African continent and Middle East under the UN umbrella.²⁵

21 ASEM Chair's Statement, "11th ASEM Summit (ASEM11)," ASEM InfoBoard, July 16, 2016, <https://www.aseminfoboard.org/events/11th-asem-summit-asem11>.

22 Cambodia News Gazette, "Cambodian Top Diplomat Reaffirms Cambodia's Commitment to Host 13th ASEM Summit."

23 Chheang Vannarith, "Cambodia Reasserts a Neutral Foreign Policy," Vannarith Chheang (blog), January 25, 2018, <https://vannarithchheang.com/2018/01/25/cambodia-reasserts-a-neutral-foreign-policy/>.

24 Rectangular Strategy-Phase III, "2013 Rectangular Strategy-Phase III," Council for the Development of Cambodia, 2013, <http://www.cambodiainvestment.gov.kh/wp-content/uploads/2013/11/2013-Rectangular-Strategy-III-En8.pdf>; Vannarith, "Economic Pragmatism in Cambodia's Foreign Policy."

25 Ministry of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, "2018 Annual Outcomes and Ways Forward Report."

“From Cambodia’s perspective, chairing the said summit may help the Kingdom achieve her foreign policy objective of playing a more active and vibrant role in the regional and global integration as stated above.”

Apart from this, Cambodia has firmly dedicated to hosting the 13th ASEM summit, although realising that the organisation of such an event is quite a daunting task. From Cambodia’s perspective, chairing the said summit may help the Kingdom achieve her foreign policy objective of playing a more active and vibrant role in the regional and global integration as stated above. Prime Minister Hun Sen, at 12th ASEM Summit in Belgium last year, accentuated the significance of hosting the summit in the following year, expressing his positive prospects for close and mutual beneficial partnerships among member countries for the sake of global peace and security, as well as for the attainment of the United Nations’ 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development Goals.²⁶ Furthermore, on the occasion of 2019 ASEM Day celebration in Cambodia last March, Foreign Minister Prak Sokkhon firmly stated that “ASEM Summit next year will raise Cambodia’s profile on the world stage”. He underlined that this summit would allow the Kingdom to showcase its achievements, boost bilateral cooperation and provide many opportunities that benefit Cambodia.²⁷ In short, Cambodia has firmly committed to joining with other state members in tackling the global problems, and

to strengthening dialogues and cooperation with them based on the principle of equal partnership.

Conclusion

After the end of the civil wars and the attainment of peace and social development over the last two decades, Cambodia has become more proactive in engaging herself in the regional and global integration. However, due to the mounting global uncertainties, the Kingdom’s foreign policy needs to be flexible in order to effectively respond to the global challenges, while still putting a strong emphasis on the protection of national interests, independence, sovereignty and peace, economic development and the boosting of country’s image. The Kingdom’s dynamic engagement in the ASEM process is one of the ideal options to materialise the above foreign policy tools. Hosting the ASEM summit in 2020 signifies Cambodia’s deeper integration into the region and the world for the sake of economic cooperation, exploring new markets, building more friendship with all countries around the world and raising the Kingdom’s image in the international fora.

In the eyes of Cambodia, ASEM is one of the most appealing means to connect Asia and Europe. Given its non-binding, informal and flexible nature of dialogue, ASEM is a useful platform for Cambodia to promote bilateral and multilateral cooperation with other members in the fields of investment, trade, education and tourism. It is also an important forum, whereby Cambodia and the other 50 ASEM countries can tackle global challenges together. Further, ASEM is the best platform to promote Cambodia’s image internationally, regardless of the country’s size, economic development and limited human resource.

²⁶ Khmer Times, “Cambodia to Benefit by Hosting 2020 ASEM.”

²⁷ Cambodia News Gazette, “Cambodian Top Diplomat Reaffirms Cambodia’s Commitment to Host 13th ASEM Summit”; Khmer Times, “Cambodia to Benefit by Hosting 2020 ASEM.”

Considering its characteristics, roles and core value, ASEM fits very well with Cambodia's modern foreign policy.

To attain some tangible outcomes from hosting the upcoming ASEM meetings next year, Cambodia should introduce some outstanding issues of her interest the ASEM Chairman's statements and/or declarations. Those issues may include research and development (R&D), landmine clearance, climate change, physical infrastructure connectivity and human resource development.

One of the most feasible options is the extension of cooperation with the other ASEM members over the issues of mine clearance and the scope of work of the ASEAN Regional Mine Action Center (ARMAC) headquartered in Phnom Penh. The existing landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW) still pose a credible threat to people' lives, socio-economic development in many parts of the world, including the ASEAN region. This threat undoubtedly runs counter to the main ASEM goals — the promotion of peace, stability and sustainable development across regions. Cambodia should, therefore, take the opportunity of being the host to seek more cooperation with other members in clearing landmines inside the Kingdom, as well as in extending the ARMAC's mandate beyond ASEAN.



Reading time: 17 minutes*

China and ASEM: Objectives, Perceptions, Roles and Expectations

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Introduction

China, as the biggest member of ASEM, has played an important role in promoting Asia and Europe cooperation. Its objectives towards ASEM are in line with its foreign policy peace and development goals. In the more than over 20 years of ASEM process, China has served the role of an active contributor, leading initiator and strong promoter of practical cooperation. Generally, Chinese elite and public hold a rather positive perception of ASEM while thinking it has its own deficiencies which need to be overcome to make it more efficient, healthy and sustainable. As regards to the future of ASEM, China would like to see ASEM could be a platform for Asia and Europe to join hands in defending multilateralism, deepening pragmatic cooperation and more institutionalized, thus playing a role of stability anchor in the uncertain world.

Chinese Objectives Towards ASEM

Generally speaking, Chinese objectives towards ASEM are in line with what have been stated in the “Presidential Statement” adopted at the first ASEM Summit in 1996 that is to maintain and promote peace and stability, create favorable conditions for economic and social development, and jointly conceive the future.² Chinese government has never clearly stated its objectives as regards to ASEM and its specific targets vary according to different international, domestic situations and policy priorities at different times. However, according to Chinese leaders’ speeches, different policy proposals and initiatives, the objectives could be summarized into three aspects: to

build new type of partnerships in international relations, leading to an equal and fair international order in peaceful and cooperative way; to promote ASEM as a platform for pragmatic cooperation for common development; to make ASEM a bridge for dialogue and communication, enhancing mutual understanding.

To be the Model of New Partnership, Promoting Equal and Fair International Order

To promote a more equal and fairer international order has always been China’s foreign policy goal. From Chinese perspective, the new order has some basic elements such as equal and mutual respect, consensus building, and non-intervention and win-win cooperation. From the very early beginning, China has helped to set above elements as the basis for ASEM with the hope the principles could set an example for the new type of cooperation partnership between different countries with different levels of development, histories and political systems, and finally contributing to a fairer new international order. By now, the international context has transformed a lot, but Chinese government still strongly advocate the new type of partnership based on the principles above, which could be easily traced from Chinese foreign policy positions.

Seeking the convergence of common interests to make ASEM become a model for inter-continental equality and cooperation, and an important force in promoting the establishment of a fairer and more equal new international order has been a long-term strategic goal from Chinese side. At the first summit meeting, Chinese the then Prime Minister directly expressed Chinese hopes by saying : “Strengthening direct contacts between politicians on both continents of Asia and Europe

2 ASEM, “Presidential Statement of the First Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqz_681964/lhg_682206/zywj_682242/t1270524.shtml

will help promote the establishment of a new international political and economic order that is peaceful, stable, just and reasonable.”³ Since then, it has been repeatedly stressed by Chinese government during different levels as regards to ASEM meeting.⁴ Recent years, with the multilateral international order being challenged, China put hopes on ASEM to play a role in defending it. Under the global context full of uncertainties, Chinese government strongly believes it is high time Asia and Europe play the role of stability anchor. During the summit meeting held last year, Chinese Premier Li Keqiang openly stated: “In the common challenges facing the international community, we should strive to seek multilateral solutions and abide by the international agreements that have been reached. As advocates and beneficiaries of multilateralism, Asian and European countries should also become defenders and leaders of multilateralism.”⁵

To be a Platform for Common Development

As a developing country, seeking common development is another important foreign policy goal of China. Since 1978’s reform and opening up policy, Chinese focus has been shifted to the economic development which has been written in all important government policy papers. It has been a commonsense in

China that “development is the key to China’s solutions to all problems”.⁶ With the advent of ASEM, Chinese attach important importance to it in promoting Chinese own development to serve its core task with the hope to further explore Asia market and strengthen economic cooperation with European countries. Besides that, China emphasize the development dimension of ASEM is also highly related to its own concept of security. China holds the mindset its own development is highly depend on a stable and secure neighborhood which could only be realized with win-win cooperation towards common development.

The above goal of China towards ASEM is reflected from Chinese ASEM positions and different initiatives. In setting the ASEM principle, mutual benefit and common development have been listed and clearly stated the ASEM should focus on the economic cooperation. Then after that, China plays a very active role to put forward proposals with the common development purpose. Recent years, with its own Belt and Road initiative, Chinese government strongly support the pragmatic cooperation through connectivity.

To be a Bridge for Mutual Understanding

As the biggest country with different political system in ASEM, China fully understands the strategic mistrust and suspicion it faces, which explains China is hesitant to play leading role in ASEM. In order to dissimilate misunderstanding, China advocates the importance of ASEM as a bridge to serve mutual exchange and dialogue, which could not only contribute to the new type of partnerships between

3 “Premier Li Peng’s speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281126.shtm

4 Ma Chaoxu, “Asia-Europe summit will consolidate Asia-Europe economic partnership”, <http://yuqing.people.com.cn/n/2012/1107/c349680-19521569.html>, Wang Yi, “Strengthening new partnerships to create a better future for Asia and Europe”

5 Li Keqiang, “Li Keqiang’s speech at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting” http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-10/20/content_5332925.htm

6 “17th CPC Plenary Session report”, 1997 http://language.chinadaily.com.cn/19thcpcnationalcongress/2017-10/16/content_32684830.htm

Asian and European countries but also help the trust building between China and its neighbors. And if look at Chinese proposals at ASEM meeting, strengthening political dialogue and enhancing mutual trust has been persistently on the agenda.

Through analyzing Chinese prime ministers' speeches during different ASEM summit meeting, it could be found China keep stating Chinese peace and development policy including sharing Chinese development experiences with partner countries and classifying domestic reform measures and foreign policy positions. For example, as a response to the partners concerns to Chinese future steps towards further opening up and reform, Premier Li Keqiang gave a very detailed response as regards to China's macroeconomic policy and specific measures for opening up etc.

ASEM's role in promoting mutual understanding was concluded as: "The Meeting has become an important stage for China to carry out summit diplomacy and bilateral or multi-lateral dialogue and cooperation with many countries. It will not only help strengthen China's political, economic, scientific, cultural and cultural fields with the EU and East Asian countries. Dialogue and communication has eliminated misunderstandings and prejudice against China, creating a good external environment for China's peace development".⁷

Chinese Perception of ASEM

Generally speaking, ASEM does not enjoy high public attention in China. There are far fewer researches and media coverage of ASEM compared with other cooperation platforms. How-

ever from the existed reports, analysis and official documents, it could be easily found that Chinese perception of ASEM is highly positive. The cooperation is considered as a natural strategic choice between Europe and Asia as a result of globalization and the trend of global multi-polarity, which has contributed a lot to the Asia-Europe cooperation with huge potential for further cooperation. Of course, there are also some debates focus on its inherent deficiencies such as the ineffectiveness, imbalanced power structure and development among its three pillars.

ASEM is a Natural Result of Globalization and Multi-polarization

ASEM, launched in 1996, is widely considered as a natural result of the globalization and the trend of multi-polarization, which is repeatedly expressed by official speeches and Chinese academicians. It covers the following three important points:

Firstly, The ASEM process was initiated and developed against the background of economic globalization and political multi-polarization⁸ and it is a cooperation mechanism reflecting the changing international context of globalization and multi-polarization and conforms with the trend of globalization, multi-polarization and regional integration.⁹ "As we move into the 21st century, international relations are undergoing profound changes with two prominent features of globalization and multi-polarization. Asia and Europe are important actors in the global trends, thus the ASEM meeting reflects and adapts to these

7 Pan Guang, "ASEM process and China" in "Qiu Shi", Vol 21, 2008.

8 ASEM Team, "ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status" in "Foreign Affairs Review", Vol 85, Dec,2005

9 Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the 12th Asia-Europe Meeting" http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-10/20/content_5332925.htm

historic changes.¹⁰ “This meeting is a historic initiative. It shows that the multi-polarization trend is further developing.” As put in the first ASEM summit meeting by the time Chinese prime minister.

Secondly, Asia and Europe increasing inter-dependence and mutual complementarities provides a sound basis and big potential for mutual cooperation. “There are many political consensuses in the two regions. The economic advantages are complementary and each has its own cultural characteristics. It has laid a solid foundation for a broader and substantive dialogue and cooperation.”¹¹ Asian and European countries each have their own advantages. Economically, Europe is one of the regions with developed economy, advanced technology and abundant capital in the world. The Asian economy is booming, the market is vast and full of vitality. That makes Asia-Europe cooperation full of potential. The perception of “being full of potential” has been consistently stressed by Chinese side. At the first summit meeting, Lipeng stated that: “The cooperation between Asia and Europe will not only bring new evangelism to the people of the two continents, but also meet any challenges.”¹² At the 11th ASEM summit meeting, now Chinese Prime Minister Li keqiang also stated the great potential for Asia and Europe

cooperation.¹³

Thirdly, ASEM is an important platform to deal with the common global challenges. At the beginning of ASEM, Chinese proposed the cooperation between Asia and Europe could help promote the coming out of a more fair and justice global system to deal with the global challenges.¹⁴ With increasing interdependence and the common challenges, dealing with the common challenges has been considered as a strategic task both for Asia and Europe. “The threats and challenges faced by Asia and Europe highlight the necessity and urgency of deepening cooperation.”¹⁵ Then in 2010, dealing with common challenges has been listed as one of the initiatives from Chinese prime minister’s speech.¹⁶ So it can be seen from official cognition that China attaches importance to Asia-Europe cooperation and development of relations with Europe, not for the purpose of balancing the United States, but for coping with the challenges of globalization”.¹⁷

ASEM has made great contribution to the Asia- Europe cooperation and its strategic implication to the fairer international order is highly visible.

China inclines to see the role of ASEM from a

10 Qian Qichen, “Speech by Vice Premier Qian Qichen and Foreign Minister at the First ASEM Foreign Ministers”, Meeting https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281155.shtml

11 Secondly, Asia and Europe increasing inter-dependence and mutual complementarities provides a sound basis and big potential for mutual cooperation. “There are many political consensuses in the two regions. The economic advantages are complementary and each has its own cultural characteristics. It has laid a solid foundation for a broader and substantive dialogue and cooperation.”

12 “Premier Li Peng’s speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281126.shtml

13 Li Keqiang, “Li Keqiang’s speech at the 11th ASEM Summit”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1382115.shtml

14 “Premier Li Peng’s speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281126.shtml

15 Wen Jiabao, “Premier Wen Jiabao’s speech at the 6th ASEM Summit”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281131.shtml

16 Wen Jiabao, “Wen Jiabao’s speech at the opening ceremony of the 8th ASEM Summit”, https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t758665.shtml

17 ASEM Team, “ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status” in “Foreign Affairs Review”, Vol 85, Dec, 2005

strategic and long-term perspective. Although China clearly understands the limited results on the practical cooperation, it still repeatedly stresses the importance of the cooperation itself.

Strategically speaking, both Chinese government and scholars confirm the platform's positive role in building a new type of partnership which helps to promote the world towards multi-polarization within a more balanced and fairer international system. "The continuous development of ASEM and its promotion of Asia-Europe cooperation have had a profound impact in promoting multi-polarization in the world. And more important is the cooperation shows the possibility and great potential of civilized dialogue and cooperation between different development models and diverse cultural values."¹⁸ The positive reflection of ASEM could also be seen from the leaders' speeches. In 1998, the then prime minister Zhu Rongji in his speech made at the ASEM summit meeting expressed ASEM's new type of partnership helped the regional peace and development¹⁹ and the view is also echoed by different Chinese leaders.²⁰

Politically speaking, ASEM has been perceived as an important platform to strengthen the political dialogue and mutual trust. In the review done by the ASEM research team led by one of the most influential think tank, the political achievement of ASEM has been consid-

ered as the first one. It stated that: "The ASEM has played an active role in increasing trust and dispelling doubts and promoting political dialogue since it builds a platform and communication channels for strengthening consultation and cooperation between Asia and Europe in international affairs, where heads of successive ASEM meetings and the foreign ministers' meeting could have dialogues on major international and regional issues of common concern, covering international issues."²¹ The importance of ASEM in building trust between Asia and Europe is more highly perceived today when the world is facing more uncertainties in which Asia and Europe are expected to serve the role of stability anchor.

On specific cooperation level, even China holds higher expectation towards more results-oriented practical cooperation, Chinese government still think ASEM has contributed to the all-areas practical cooperation." In the tenth year of ASEM summit meeting, Wen Jiabao, the then minister stated: "Over the past 10 years, Asia and Europe have carried out extensive and diverse dialogues and cooperation on the basis of mutual respect, equal dialogue, gradual progress and consensus. Political dialogue has deepened, economic ties have become increasingly close, cooperation in the social field has expanded rapidly, and people to people exchanges are more frequent".²² And in 2014, Chinese Prime minister Li Keqiang also expressed very positive views of ASEM cooperation by saying: "Since the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting in the past 18 years, the pragmatic cooperation has

18 Pan Guang, "ASEM process and China", in "Qiu Shi", Vol 21, 2008.

19 Zhu Rongji, "Premier Zhu Rongji's speech at the Second Asia-Europe Meeting", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281127.shtml

20 Wen Jiabao, "Wen Jiabao's speech at the opening ceremony of the 5th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281130.shtml, Hu Jintao, "Speech by President Hu Jintao at the 7th ASEM Summit",

21 ASEM Team, "ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status" in "Foreign Affairs Review", Vol 85, Dec, 2005

22 Wen Jiabao, "Wen Jiabao's speech at the opening ceremony of the 6th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zjyh_682240/t1281131.shtml

flourished, social and cultural exchanges have become increasingly widespread."²³

ASEM has its Inherent Deficiencies but with Huge Potential for Further Cooperation

Contrary to the above positive perception of ASEM, there are also a lot of debates and analysis in China, especially within the academic circles focus on its inherent deficiencies which to a large extent diminishes its role as an inter-regional cooperation mechanism with a nickname of "talk shop" without down to earth projects felt by public.

Imbalanced power structure damages the equality of the partnership. The imbalanced power structure of ASEM is not there are more European countries than Asian ones, but more important is European countries are more integrated and institutionalized and more developed than Asia. What makes it even imbalanced is the cooperation structure makes the EU has more leverage on its Asian partners. "The multiple, multi-level conference mechanism of the ASEM and the multi-layer governance within the EU are similar in terms of institutional structure. It divides different jurisdictions by function and also encourages broad participation within both government and non-government sectors. A similar institutional structure can provide the EU and its member states with more channels of influence, giving it a comparative advantage over Asian members."²⁴

There are imbalanced developments among its different pillars. Because of different expectations between European and Asian countries, the three pillars of ASEM of political, economic a cultural cooperation has progressed at different paces. EU primarily see ASEM as an informal dialogue platform either than a pragmatic cooperation one, which makes the economic pillar to a large extent invisible. A typical example is the continuity of the summit meeting without any interruption while the economic and financial ministerial meeting had ever been interrupted for more than 10 years. "The little attention put by the media to ASEM is because of the cooperation added value could not be felt by the public. The economic cooperation of ASEM has long been in hibernation," said Zhang xiaokang, the Chinese high official of ASEM in 2014.

Finally, the lack of institutions weakens its efficiency. On one side, during the past 23 years, more and more countries have joined the ASEM, which implies more diversified and more difficult to reach consensus. On the hand, At present, the ASEM has not yet established a secretariat, which makes the platform face capacity problem. "The non-institutionalization of the ASEM has led to the looseness and slow progress of Asia-Europe cooperation."²⁵ Recently, China has put more emphasis on the efficiency of the cooperation. At the 11th ASEM summit meeting, Chinese premier has advocated for more pragmatic mechanisms and enhance the effectiveness of Asia-Europe cooperation.

Chinese Comprehensive Roles under the ASEM framework

23 Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the first plenary session of the 10th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1201413.shtml

24 Zhang Jun, "Developing the European model in international relations: From the perspective of the ASEM process", in "European Studies", Vol 1, 2005, P4-10

25 ASEM Team, "ASEM survey and analysis of cognitive status" in "Foreign Affairs Review", Vol 85, Dec,2005

As the engine of Asia-Europe development and the promoter of Asia-Europe cooperation, China has always participated in the Asia-Europe process in the spirit of active participation, seeking common ground while reserving differences, expanding consensus, and strengthening cooperation since the establishment of the Asia-Europe Meeting. China's role in the cooperation process could be summarized as an active contributor, leading initiator and strong promoter of practical cooperation.

Advocate of the Concept of Equal, Fair and Inclusive Cooperation

The Chinese government and relevant departments have issued many important and constructive views on the objectives, significance, and principles, which made important contributions to the achievement of concept consensus among ASEM members in all aspects.

ASEM involves varieties of countries from Asia and Europe with different culture, histories and political systems. Adhering to the principle of equality, fairness, inclusiveness and non-intervention is the precondition for coordination and cooperation. In 1996, At the first leaders' meeting, the then Chinese Prime minister put forward the five basic principles for ASEM with equality, mutual trust, mutual learning and mutual benefit at its core, which could be seen finally in the Presidency statement of the first summit meeting. China has advocated the principle during the whole ASEM process.

After the 9.11 in 2001, Chinese government sees the urgency to promote cultural and civilization dialogue. In the 4th ASEAM summit meeting, Chinese prime minister for the first time advocated for the "civilization dialogue"

and promised China would host the ASEM Conference on Civilization and Culture in due course. After that, China, together with France jointly drafted The "ASEM Declaration on Culture and Civilization Dialogue" adopted at the Fifth Asia-Europe Meeting, which embodied China's views and propositions on respecting the diversity of the world and encouraging equal dialogue among different civilizations. Since then, China keeps promoting inclusive dialogue among different cultures under ASEM framework.

Active Participant and Initiator within ASEM

China is an advocate and builder of Asia-Europe dialogue and cooperation. Chinese leaders have participated in all the summits of the "Asia-Europe Meeting". At all the previous Asia-Europe Meetings, China has proposed valuable and urgent issues to be resolved in order to expand and strengthen Asia-Europe cooperation.

Since the first Asia-Europe Meeting, China has initiated a series of important activities within the framework. In the past 22 years, Chinese leaders have proposed 31 cooperation initiatives at the Asia-Europe Meeting and become the country that advocates the most follow-up actions of the ASEM. Chinese initiatives cover wide ranges of areas, not only including the traditional areas of trade and investment, science and technology, environment and sustainable development but also some new areas such as connectivity, customs, justice, and anti-terrorism, which helps to further expand the space for Asia-Europe cooperation. Besides that, China actively provides human resources and financial support for many activities and projects and is one of the biggest contributors to ASEM.

"In the past 22 years, Chinese leaders have proposed 31 cooperation initiatives at the Asia-Europe Meeting and become the country that advocates the most follow-up actions of the ASEM."

Strong Promoter for Practical Cooperation

Different from European partners, China has always attached great importance on practical cooperation within ASEM. At the first summit meeting, Chinese government emphasis the focus should be on economic cooperation with the statement: "At present, the role of economic factors in international relations is rising. To explore Asia-Europe cooperation, economic cooperation should be placed at the forefront as an important basis for the Asia-Europe partnership. I hope that this meeting will have a broad consensus on economic cooperation."²⁶ Also at the meeting, China put forward very pragmatic proposals to make preparation for economic cooperation such as, to establish expert groups to make analysis of Asia and Europe investment situation and put forward action plans. After that, broadening and strengthening economic cooperation between Asia and Europe has always been on Chinese agenda for Asia and Europe cooperation.

Taking the 7th ASEM Summit held in 2008 as an example, under the leadership of the host country China, the meeting focused on how to deal with the financial crisis that swept the world at that time, reflecting the mechanism transition to the solution of practical problems and move towards a pragmatic development

direction. And it is also China who proposed the restart of the meeting of the Asian-European Ministers of Economy after more than 10 years of suspension.

After the international financial crisis, under the context of rising of anti-globalization, China put more energy on the pragmatic cooperation. In 2013, during the 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting held in India, Chinese foreign minister put the down to earth pragmatic cooperation as one of his three proposals for ASEM, which he thinks could make ASEM win the hearts of the people.²⁷ And at 2016 summit meeting, Premier Li Keqiang made the point even clearer by saying: "We believe that although the ASEM is an informal dialogue mechanism, it is necessary to lead cooperation to a more pragmatic direction, especially to strengthen economic and trade cooperation."²⁸ With Chinese promotion, the connectivity working group finally set up and by now it has been a permanent issue of the ASEM, which helps to promote more pragmatic mechanisms, and enhanced the effectiveness of Asia-Europe cooperation.

Concluding Remarks: Chinese Expectation Towards Future ASEM

Chinese government holds a rather positive perception of ASEM, but it does not think ASEM has met its expectations and it still thinks the potential of ASEM needs further exploration, especially in dealing with the com-

26 "Premier Li Peng's speech at the first Asia-Europe Meeting", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281126.shtml

27 Wang Yi, "Strengthening new partnerships to create a better future for Asia and Europe" https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1098955.shtml,

28 Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the first plenary session of the 10th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1201413.shtml

mon challenges today the uncertain world is facing. In order to make the ASEM as an effective, healthy and sustainable platform to fulfill the tasks and goals, China has put forward its expectations as regards to the future of ASEM.

To overcome challenges, strengthen cooperation, and decisively defend multilateralism. The world today is facing unprecedented challenges from different types of protectionism and unilateralism. China clearly understands the complicated situation within ASEM framework, where US is always an unavoidable factor. Most Asian countries put their security interests in the US basket while integrating with Chinese economies, let alone the transatlantic pillar of European countries' foreign policy. But in the face of Trump administration's unilateralism, China thinks Europe and Asia should join hands to send out strong messages to the world instead of taking opportunistic positions. "At this time, Asia and Europe strengthening cooperation is a very important stabilizer. If Asia and Europe gave up cooperation and kept silent, the situation would become more complicated. Strengthening regional cooperation between Asia and Europe is actually a hedge and balance between unilateralism and isolationism."²⁹ The expectation towards ASEM explains why recent years Chinese openly and strongly called for Asia and Europe cooperation defending multilateralism

To promote ASEM transform from a "talk shop" to a delivery platform. As described above, China perceives ASEM's added value has not been widely felt by the public. In order to increase its vitality and influence, the focus should be put on the rebalancing of its three

pillars through more pragmatic cooperation to unleash its cooperation potential. Since 2014, China has successfully made the connectivity accepted as a common focus for EU and Asia. Nowadays, China put high expectations for connectivity initiative and its working group to inject momentum for ASEM's transition by jointly seeking synergies between different Asia and European partners. "The ASEM has been over 20 years and needs new impetus to achieve sustainable development. Our aim is to promote a better transformation of the ASEM that explains why we put forward the connectivity initiative."³⁰ To deal with the institutional deficiency of ASEM. There exist wide debates about ASEM's inefficiency. Looking at the official position, as early as 2009, China has openly called for to further strengthen the institutionalization of the Asia-Europe Meeting and provide stronger support and guarantee for Asia-Europe cooperation³¹ the Chair supporting group, which plays the seemingly role of secretariat demonstrates Chinese expectation towards ASEM's institutional building. "Institutional building will help consolidate the ASEM platform and ensure that it produces more practical outcomes...we hope to take this as an opportunity to strengthen internal coordination and promote the mechanisms for more practical cooperation, in order to expand the influence of ASEM and enhance the efficiency of ASEM cooperation."³²

²⁹ Quotes from the interview of Feng Zhong Ping, http://www.gov.cn/xinwen/2018-10/16/content_5331175.htm

³⁰ Quotes from the interview of Xie Bohua, <http://www.chinatradenews.com.cn/content/201706/20/c2968.html>, 20th, June, 201

³¹ Yang Jiechi, "Foreign Minister Yang Jiechi's Speech at the Ninth ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1281171.shtml2009.

³² Li Keqiang, "Li Keqiang's speech at the first plenary session of the 10th ASEM Summit", https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gjhdqzz_681964/lhg_682206/zyjh_682240/t1201413.shtml



Reading time: 9 minutes*

Germany and ASEM – Engagement and Expectations

Mark Hauptmann¹

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- ¹ **Mark Hauptmann** is a Member of the German Bundestag for his home constituency in Thuringia since 2013. He is a member of the Committee on Economic and Energy Affairs as well as a substitute member of the Foreign Affairs Committee. Since late 2014, he is also a member of the city council in Suhl. Before entering the German Bundestag he worked in Brussels, Beijing, Erfurt and Berlin.

Mark Hauptmann holds a master's degree in political sciences, intercultural business communication and economic and social history, studying in Germany, Japan and the USA. Joining the "Junge Union" in 1999, he became a member of the CDU in 2003. From 2012 to 2014 he was a member of the federal board of the "Junge Union" and chairman of the International Commission on European, Foreign, and Security Affairs. In addition, he holds membership in the CDU's Federal Committee on Matters of Foreign, Security, Development, and Human Rights Policy. In 2016 Mark Hauptmann became Chairman of the district association of the CDU Suhl. In 2018 he was elected Chairman of the Young Group of the CDU/CSU parliamentary group, as well as Chairman of the Interparliamentary Group Germany-Belarus of the German Bundestag.

Introduction

The Asia-Europe-Meeting (ASEM) has been an established forum for exchange between Europe and Asia for 20 years.

In order to keep pace in a rapidly changing world, Germany must raise its relations with Asia to a new level. In light of the increasing complexity and importance of economic and security challenges, cooperation at a purely bilateral level does not seem sufficient. It is therefore important to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by increased, institutionalized cooperation.

ASEM could play a central role in deepening European-Asian relations. The key question will be, whether ASEM will become more than the pure dialogue platform it has been until now.

Germany's and Europe's Future Lies in Asia

Not only China, but also its Asian neighbours have undergone rapid economic and social development in recent decades, which has led to the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific region. The golden future of these emerging markets has not just recently been named, but has been characterized by a steadily growing and enormously dynamic development for years.

Asia now accounts for almost two-thirds of the world's gross domestic product, two-thirds of trade and two-thirds of the world's population.

During the last two years, German trade with Asia reached a new peak. Asia and Germany are interconnected economically in many

ways, and there is a continuing mutual interest. This makes great investment potential for German and European companies: With high growth-rates, low inflation and little unemployment, Asian markets offer long-term opportunities and a stable potential for future investment. At the same time, Germany remains one of Asia's most important European trading partners.

Some key economic data illustrate this positive development quite distinctly:

The German-Asian foreign trade increased exceptionally strong in 2018. The trading volume reached a new high of 412.7 billion Euros. At the same time, the share of German trade with Asia in total German foreign trade reached 17.1 percent. In 2018, imports from the Asia-Pacific countries to Germany increased by almost 5 percent and amounted to 214.3 billion Euros. Furthermore, a strong increase in German exports of 6.6 percent, compared with the same period of the previous year, can be recorded. The exports to the Asia-Pacific region reached a total of 198.4 billion euros in 2018. Compared with the total export growth of the Federal Republic of Germany (+3.0%), the Asia-Pacific region recorded an increase more than twice as high in percentage terms. German exports to the ASEAN region increased in 2018 by 11.3 percent to EUR 28.2 billion, compared to the year before. Especially German exports to the Philippines (+26.6%) and Vietnam (+18.0%) have increased recently.²

Accordingly, the importance of technological innovation, economic dynamism and

² Ostasiatischer Verein e.V., "Deutscher Handel mit Asien wächst 2018 überdurchschnittlich", accessed July 17 2019, URL: <https://www.oav.de/meldungen/beitrag-lesen/deutscher-handel-mit-asien-waechst-2018-ueberdurchschnittlich.html>.

networking in Asia for Germany has been stressed several times by the German Government. For instance, on the occasion of the last ASEM summit on 18-19 October 2018 in Brussels, Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel reaffirmed this commitment during a corresponding statement.³

“One can say without a doubt: The future of Germany’s prosperity lies in Asia.”

In addition to the future economic prosperity of Europe, it is also the world’s future peace and security that will be decided in Asia. Europe depends on a strong and stable Asia, both economically and in terms of security policy.

Germany therefore actively promotes confidence-building and détente policy in the strategic dialogue. Multilateral forms of cooperation such as ASEM are the method of choice. Above all, ASEM offers the opportunity to bring together the different positions of EU member states regarding the other members of the meeting and therefore to reduce redundancies.

In addition, the threat posed by international terrorism, cross-border organised crime, migration, piracy and human trafficking is being addressed by Germany in the context of ASEM.⁴ The importance of the Asian states as partners of Europe in solving critical global is-

ues will continue to grow in the future.

Germany shares the European vision set out for a comprehensive strategy to better connect Europe and Asia. Including not only physical connectivity - transportation networks, energy networks and digital networks, but connectivity of services, investments and people. The European approach to lasting connectivity is based on respect for common rules. European-Asian connectivity is the future.

In context of ASEM, Germany’s intentions can accordingly be summarized as to better connect the cultural and economic areas and thereby create new opportunities, to set signals for free trade and against protectionism, to promote peaceful solutions to the conflicts on the Korean peninsula, in the Taiwan strait and in the South China Sea, and to promote human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

The future lies in a strengthened cooperation between Europe and Asia. Nonetheless, due to the increasing complexity and importance of economic and security challenges, it is getting more and more demanding to identify and pursue common European goals.

Bilateral Partnership is not Enough

Germany and many other European countries have a long and far-reaching history of relations with most Asian countries.⁵

But when it comes to Asia as a whole, there can be no narrowly defined uniform concept for German foreign policy. The political, social and cultural diversity calls for diverse

3 Angela Merkel, “Regierungserklärung von Bundeskanzlerin Dr. Angela Merkel zum Europäischen Rat am 17./18. Oktober 2018 in Brüssel und zum ASEM-Gipfel am 18./19. Oktober 2018 in Brüssel vor dem Deutschen Bundestag am 17. Oktober 2018 in Berlin,” in Bulletin der Bundesregierung, Nr. 112-1. (Oktober 2018).

4 Auswärtiges Amt, Aufgaben der deutschen Außenpolitik. Südostasien sowie Australien, Neuseeland und Pazifische Inseln am Beginn des 21. Jahrhunderts (Berlin: Auswärtiges Amt, 2002), p. 9.

5 Parag Khanna, The Future is Asian (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2019), p. 239 ff.

approaches.⁶ Unlike the member states of the EU, the Asian states are hardly linked by supranational organizations. This fact explains the importance of a common dialogue platform like ASEM for Germany to address political issues.

Especially from a European point of view, the Asia-Europe-Meeting is a great opportunity to participate in the dynamics of Asia and to get involved in shaping them. The meeting has developed into the central multiregional discussion forum for Eurasian cooperation. Its number of participants has doubled since the first meeting in Bangkok in 1996⁷ and Germany is committed to continue its active role in the future development of ASEM together with like-minded partners.

The decisive question will be: How can an organisation with currently 53 members unlock its potential for enhanced cooperation? The format lacks the ability to act. It is clear that this can only be improved by a stronger institutional anchoring. However, this institutional weakness should not diminish the basic concept of a forum for inter-governmental discussions on topical issues of European-Asian relations. The open dialogue approach has been ASEAN's strength so far. However, further development is now promising the greatest opportunity. What is necessary now, is a stable institutional body.

As the bridge between Europe and Asia is be-

coming more and more important, its pillars and connecting pieces have to be enhanced to bear heavier burdens in the future. Such a strengthened bridgework would consist both institutionalization and capacity for action.

ASEM could play a central role in deepening European-Asian relations. The decisive question here will be, whether ASEM can further develop to jointly shape policies between Europe and Asia in the future and thus become more than the pure dialogue platform it has been so far.

Potential for Enhanced Institutionalised Cooperation

In recent years, the idea that ASEM should be more action-oriented, has gained more and more importance.

The creation of a permanent ASEM secretariat could be the first step. An increased degree of institutionalization would allow the participating states to coordinate and pool their interests and to speak with one voice. This would simplify negotiating multilateral treaties and agreements. A joint secretariat could not only prepare the ASEM summits, but also coordinate the discussions and the formation of opinion between the summits including the regular specialised experts' meetings involving top level officials from various European and Asian governments. It would also make sense to set up an ASEM secretariat at the most important regional organizations EU and ASEAN. Since increased institutional integration is also expected to increase bureaucracy and generate costs, financing will be a central aspect that needs to be further discussed.

The potential for a more powerful ASEM is

6 Auswärtiges Amt, Asien in der deutschen Außenpolitik, last modified July 07 2015, accessed July 17 2019, URL: <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/de/aussenpolitik/regionaleschwerpunkte/asien/asien-deutsche-aussenpolitik/217256>.

7 Yeo Lay Hwee, "The 10th ASEM Summit – Paving the Way Towards an Asia-Europe Marketplace?", in *The Future of Asia-Europe Cooperation*, ed. Dr. Wilhelm Hofmeister and Patrick Rueppel, (Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung and European Union, 2015), p. 1-6.

manifold. It provides a framework to address challenges of global concern with almost all of Asia at once.

ASEM offers the possibility to pool the various Asian policies (not only) of the EU member states in numerous possibilities for cooperation. However, this can only be effective, if the different positions would be combined in favour of concrete and balanced approaches. Forging these approaches, again requires a body of decision-making. We can no longer stop at rhetorical announcements. What is needed for a vital future of ASEM, is active implementation of determined steps forward.

ASEM is experienced in identifying lowest common denominator in topics involving the majority of its members. Such as international security concerns, terrorism and international crime, but also environmental issues. The EU has four of its official Strategic Partners in Asia (China, India, Japan and Korea) and needs influential Asian partners to address jointly global challenges.

In present and past conflicts it became evident that there are no substantial transnational organizations in the Asian Pacific region that could step in to settle disputes between nation states. However, ASEM has already proven itself as a platform to engage in crisis diplomacy by means of “quiet diplomacy”⁸ - providing the setting for mediation or talks - as well as statements of the Chair, addressing for example the conflict on the Korean Peninsula in its statement of the 11th

ASEM Summit in Ulaanbaatar⁹ or allowing for useful action on water security (e.g. in Danube and Mekong river basin countries).

The importance of the Asian partners for Germany and Europe as partners in tackling the threats of terrorism and international crime will continue to grow with their increasing economic weight and closer cooperation. Germany is eager to further expand, deepen and foster the existing good relations.

The same applies to environmental issues. Within a strengthened framework of ASEM, the climate issue has the potential to be broken down into concrete issues of environmental protection and nature conservation, as all countries in Asia are affected by these issues. Europe could act here as a technology partner for Asia.

2020 – Discussing a strengthened Asia-Europe Meeting

Asia matters to Europe and will do so even more in the future. As noted earlier, Germany's and Europe's economic future is strongly connected with Asia, and the increasing complexity and importance of economic and security challenges around the world seems to condemn cooperation on a purely bilateral level as insufficient. It is therefore inevitable to take advantage of the many opportunities offered by institutionalized cooperation. The potential for a stronger and more institutionalized ASEM is as appealing as it is complex, with topics ranging from multilateral trade treaties, to security policy issues,

8 Michael Reiterer, “Asia Cooperation: Quiet Diplomacy and Conflict Mediation – A European Perspective”, in *The Age of Connectivity – ASEM and Beyond*, ed. Dr. Beatrice Gorawantschy, Megha Sarmah and Patrick Rueppel, (Singapore: Konrad-Adenauer Stiftung, 2016), p. 39-45.

9 ASEM, Chair's Statement to the 11th ASEM Summit, 20 Years of ASEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity, Ulaanbaatar: July 15-16 2016, accessed July 17 2019, URL: https://cdn.aseminfoboard.org/documents/Chairs-Statement-ASEM11-adopted_7ajqc3.pdf, paras. 25-27.

to environmental protection. Despite these challenges, ASEM could grow into a platform, where European and Asian stakeholders are able to discuss important future topics, and therefore strengthen the bridge between Europe and Asia.

“Asia matters to Europe and will do so even more in the future.”

The upcoming 2020 ASEM summit in Phnom Penh will be the right time to talk about a stronger institutionalization of ASEM and to discuss opportunities for an enhanced cooperation. Germany and Europe will only be able to defend and keep their prosperity, if we foster and cultivate our interdependence with Asia. There is a lot of potential still to be unlocked in shaping the European-Asian cooperation.

As of today, the German government has already noticed the 2020 ASEM summit in order to look into it more closely. Nevertheless, it is still too far away to make certain statements of how the German government is preparing for the summit, who will be involved in the preparations, if it is treated like a big chance and who will finally travel to Cambodia. Generally speaking, the lead times for detailed planning processes of international conferences are very short. This means that in most cases it is only decided a few weeks or even days before the conference starts, whether the Federal Chancellor will attend it, or whether she will be represented by a Minister or a State Secretary. Whatever the decisions will be – Germany should be willing to actively participate in the process of strengthening ASEM and making it a high-priority project in its own best interest.



Reading time: 17 minutes*

Is Europe's Future in Asia? The Asia-Europe Meeting as an Instrument of the Rules-Based Multilateral Order

Patrick Rüppel¹

*This article appeared previously in International Reports | Issue 4, titled "Who Will Save the Liberal World Order?"

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Prior to that, he was a member of the board of directors of the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research, for which he has been analyzing the conflicts in the Philippines and Myanmar since 2009. He has also worked at the German Parliament, private sector, ISEAS Yusof Ishak Institute in Singapore and KAS Philippines. His main research interests include security developments in the Asia-Pacific, violent extremism and terrorism, Asia-Europe relations and geopolitical dynamics in both regions.

“The world order as we have known it for decades is in turmoil. Countries in Europe and Asia in particular have been profiting from the rules-based multilateral order which provided them with security and allowed them to prosper. Therefore, they are strongly affected by the current volatility. Instead of relying on other powers, countries in both regions should work together and proactively shape the future of multilateralism through the Asia-Europe Meeting.”

Introduction

The international community is confronted with severe challenges – migration, terrorism, climate change, and cyber threats, just to name a few. None of these topics can be resolved by individual countries or stakeholders alone since they are not only transnational but interconnected. Yet, we observe a return of preferences for easy, nationalistic, and unilateral answers. As a result, many of the principles that have guided international politics since the Second World War seem to be changing. This gives way to a new narrative which declares that the old hegemon, the United States of America, is in a state of decline, while the new great power of China is rising and the old American arch enemy, Russia, is re-emerging on the world stage. The narrative further states that traditional patterns of international cooperation are being questioned, big countries once again argue from a position of strength, use force to impose their will on others, deny mutual benefits of collaboration, and that smaller states simply have to accept their fate.

While the rules-based multilateral world order is certainly being tested and changes are taking place, it would be too early to write a eulogy for multilateralism. Especially countries in Europe and Asia, many of which are small and medium-sized and would thus be unable to thrive in a system shaped by a “might is right” attitude, are stepping up to defend the

old order. In their search for global partners, Germany and the

European Union should therefore not lose sight of Asia. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is one of the crucial platforms in this regard. A SEM is now well into its third decade and the last ASEM Summit attended by the Heads of State and Government of the current 53 participating partners was held on 18 and 19 October 2018 in Brussels, Belgium. This article will shed light on the competitive advantages A SEM has for Asia-Europe relations and why this time of geopolitical uncertainty may provide a window of opportunity for this dialogue process.

Challenging Times for the Multilateral System

Indeed, one of the main challenges to the rules-based multilateral order is the return of great power politics which, combined with renewed preferences for unilateralist and nationalist approaches, create an unfavourable environment for multilateral cooperative arrangements. This becomes even clearer when existing multi lateral agreements are put to the test. For instance, conflicts in the South and East China Sea, the annexation of Crimea, and advancements in North Korea’s nuclear missile programme have highlighted the ineffectiveness of non-binding multilateral agreements. Additionally, these cases have displayed the limited options for the in-

ternational community to act on instances of non-compliance with international rules and norms.

Secondly, populist leaders who are offering seemingly easy solutions – often involving protectionist and nationalist concepts – to complex challenges, have exploited growing concerns and decreasing societal cohesion within countries. Many of these leaders are less consensus-driven, unwilling to make compromises, seek short-term gains, and question the value of multilateral initiatives as they often do not produce immediate results. They do not look for win-win outcomes, but refer zero sum games; ultimately destroying trust as well as confidence which are required for multilateral arrangements. The most prominent case is the current foreign policy of the US. Its more nationalistic, inward-looking, and less predictable approach resulted in the withdrawal from previously agreed upon or signed treaties. This not only raises questions about the commitment of the US to multilateralism and the reliability of the longstanding US partnerships in both Asia and Europe, but also reduces trust in concessions made by the US. This new approach of the long-time defender of a rules-based multilateral order has severe implications for illiberal countries. This is because they feel less obliged to follow international norms or use the developments in the US as a justification to implement illiberal domestic and foreign policies. At the same time, the Chinese leadership portrays itself as the new champion of multilateralism and drives forward economic and investment projects. However, it is through many of those initiatives that the Chinese create dependencies, interfere in the domestic affairs of other states, and promote a form of multilateralism that seems incompatible with a Western understanding of it. Yet, in both cases, it is im-

portant to look beyond the official statements and observe the real actions as well as intentions.

This great power politics goes hand in hand with the proliferation of multilateral fora. The political landscape, with regard to multilateral approaches, is extremely diverse, complex, and characterised by different formats. These range from highly institutionalised forms of international or regional cooperation, to informal and non-binding meetings among Heads of Government and resort ministers, and issue-specific dialogues. Especially this informal multilateralism has to continually justify its existence and benefits, and ASEM clearly falls into this category. In times of growing political volatility and hostility within the international system – but also individual nation-states which have direct implications on multilateralism and the support for the current world order –, it is no surprise that multilateral fora face pressure and criticism. This becomes even more imminent in times of scarce financial resources. New fora are also being created either to address a particular challenge collaboratively or because states feel that the current formats do not sufficiently reflect their interests and respective power. For example, emerging regional powers, which contest the existing status quo, might set up their own new projects or institutions to drive their own agenda and shape their neighbouring countries according to their own interests. In the Eurasian context, this is the case with Russia's Eurasian Union, but also China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) and Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). These developments and the sharp increase in multilateral initiatives have led some experts to the conclusion that there is an oversupply of such fora, ulti-

Summit

ASEP
Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting

Attended by Heads of State and Government of the European and Asian countries, the Presidents of the European Council and of the European Commission, and the ASEAN Secretary General. They serve as the highest level of decision-making in the ASEM process, and are held every second year, alternating between Asia and Europe.

AEBF
Asia-Europe Business Forum

AEPF
Asia-Europe People's Forum

ASEFYL
Asia-Europe Young Leaders Summit

Foreign Ministers Meetings

Attended by High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security policy Federica Mogherini, ministers of Foreign Affairs of the European and Asian countries and the ASEAN Secretary General. They have the responsibility for the overall coordination of the ASEM process and are a driving force of the ASEM political dialogue.

Ministerial Meetings

Economy, Finance, Environment, Culture, Transport, Labour and Employment, Education, Science and Technology, ICT, Small and Medium Enterprises ministers meet on a regular basis to discuss issues of mutual concern. Additional ministerial conferences are held irregularly on specific issues and areas that are not covered by the main ministerial meetings.

Senior Officials' Meetings

bring together high-level civil servants from the Foreign Ministries of all ASEM partners for the overall coordination of the ASEM process. Sectoral SOMs are also held in preparation of the various ministerial meetings.

Regular dialogues

e.g. Customs General Directors' Meeting; Conference of General Directors of Immigration; Informal Seminar on Human Rights; Rectors' Conference; Mayors and Governors Meeting. Ad hoc activities: sustainable development, nuclear safety, disaster is reduction, biodiversity, youth, employment, others

Activities and initiatives

are organised by ASEM partners on a wide range of issues of mutual interest. A full overview of all ASEM meetings can be found at the ASEM InfoBoard.

<p>1st ASEM Summit</p> <p>1 to 2 March 1996 Bangkok, Thailand</p> <p>26 participants:</p> <p>European group:</p> <p>15 EU members and European Commission</p> <p>Asian group:</p> <p>7 ASEAN members; China, Japan and South Korea</p>	<p>12th ASEM Summit</p> <p>18 to 19 October 2018 Brussels, Belgium</p> <p>53 participants:</p> <p>European group:</p> <p>28 EU members, Norway, Switzerland and the European Union</p> <p>Asian group:</p> <p>10 ASEAN members; Australia, Bangladesh, China, India, Japan, Kazakhstan, South Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, Russia and the ASEAN Secretariat</p>
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Source: Own illustration based on ASEM 2018: ASEM Factsheet, in: <http://bit.ly/2RpSnc3> [7 Jul 2018].

mately resulting in a phenomenon described as “forum shopping” and “pure summit diplomacy”.

Coming a Long Way since 1996

Against this hostile background and the plethora of multilateral initiatives, ASEM represents an often underestimated approach and one that might possibly be a blueprint for future multilateral cooperation.

Despite sharing a long and eventful history, it was not until 1994 that the idea of placing an institutional exchange solely between Asia and Europe was on the agenda. This visionary idea, which was proposed by Singapore's then Prime Minister, Goh Chok Tong, drove the development of a multilateral framework that complemented the already existing ties between Asia and America as well as Europe and America, and first came into reality in 1996 – the Asia- Europe Meeting was born.

When the inaugural ASEM Summit was held on 1 and 2 March 1996 in Bangkok, Thailand, 25 countries and the European Commission were present. Today, ASEM has 53 partners which together account for around 60 per cent of the world's population, 60 per cent of the global GDP, and 60 per cent of global trade.² This clearly illustrates the significance and impact ASEM can have on a global scale. However, the process also has much added value for intra- regional cooperation. For instance, government representatives and leaders of the ASEAN states and the three North-east Asian nations (China, Japan, and South Korea) met regularly between 1995 and 1997

to discuss matters related to ASEM and coordinate their positions. These exchanges were a final push towards regional cooperation in East Asia, which had faced several gridlocks over the previous years, and eventually resulted in the formation of the ASEAN Plus Three framework in 1997.³

Despite this huge potential, ASEM has often been criticised for underachieving and lacking tangible outcomes. This is mainly due to its organisational structure. ASEM is an informal dialogue process – and it is important to recognise it as such – which aims to offer a platform for exchange and discussion on cooperation projects addressing challenges both Europe and Asia are facing. It is neither an institution nor international organisation. It lacks an institutional body in the form of a secretariat. Instead, the main drivers of ASEM are the respective Ministries of Foreign Affairs which are supported by four coordinators – two from Asia representing ASEAN and non- ASEAN Asia and two from Europe representing the European Union and the rotating EU presidency. This does not mean that ASEM functions on a purely ad-hoc basis and lacks any form of continuity, however. ASEM does in fact have a broad structure (illustrated in fig. 1) and it is important to look beyond the biennial ASEM Summit of the Heads of State and Government. Besides this comprehensive structure, ASEM has created the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF). ASEF stands out since it is the only institution to have developed from the 22-year old ASEM process so far. Based in Singapore, it should, however, not be confused with a de facto secretariat as its mandate is to facilitate exchange, promote understanding, and foster relations among the

2 Cf. Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) 2018: ASEM Factsheet, in: <http://bit.ly/2Rp5Nc3> [7 Jun 2018].

3 Cf. Stubbs, Richard 2002: A SEAN Plus Three – Emerging East Asian Regionalism?, in: Asian Survey, Vol. XLII, No. 3, pp. 440–455, here: pp. 442–443.

different stakeholders involved in the Asia-Europe Meeting.

“ASEM is less impacted by the great power competition that has hijacked debates in some of the other fora and has resulted in political gridlocks there.”

Thematically, A SEM focuses on three pillars which reflect the cornerstones of the bi-regional relations – political (including global challenges ranging from security and environmental to humanitarian questions), economic and financial, as well as social and cultural. The overarching theme for all three pillars and activities of ASEM is connectivity, which ASEM aims to achieve in all areas of cooperation. This theme is supposed to go beyond physical connections to encompass people-to-people, institutional, digital, and cultural connectivity. Its informal and open approach without a binding character enables ASEM to provide a platform for political dialogue supporting bi-regional cooperation based on common standards and sustainability. Ultimately, this should also support the rules-based international system and facilitate more binding as well as concrete bi- and unilateral initiatives.

Compared to the other main fora in Asia – the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), East Asia Summit (EAS), and ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) –, A SEM is the only one of the four that does not include the United States, but involves all ASEAN and EU member states as well as both regional organisations themselves. Although ASEM is the biggest of the four organisations with 53 partners, it is less impacted by the great power competition that has hijacked debates in some of the other fora and resulted in political gridlocks. Furthermore, ASEM is the sole ini-

tiative with a clear European-Asian geographic focus and is in a unique position to shape these interregional relations.

Due to its comprehensive web of different dialogue formats and a holistic approach touching upon almost all areas relevant to Asia-Europe relations, ASEM is well placed to become a driver for rules-based multilateralism. Its added advantage is that its structure reflects a multi-track approach combining all three levels of traditional diplomacy through the inclusion of Heads of State / Government, ministers, non-governmental organisations, businesses, journalists, and think tanks – to name a few. Furthermore, key countries are supportive of the process. For instance, the EU has been using ASEM quite strategically by providing technical assistance to Asian partners and expanding the theme of connectivity beyond physical infrastructure by focusing on aspects of connectivity of institutions, ideas, and people. At the same time, China takes a positive approach towards ASEM as it sees possible synergies with its own Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), as well as with the Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank (AIIB).⁴

Between Remaining and Becoming More Relevant

Yet, ASEM also has to address inherent challenges in order to show its benefits and added value. With its many partners, A SEM is one of the biggest international projects outside of the UN system. Naturally, it is difficult to come to agreements which go beyond the

⁴ Cf. Yeo, Lay Hwee 2017: A SEM’s Cooperation with the European Union – A SEM and Beyond, in: Echle, Christian / Sarmah, Megha / Kliem, Frederick (eds.): ASEAN at 50 – A Look at its External Relations, Panorama: Insights into Asian and European Affairs, Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (KAS), Jan 2017, Singapore, pp. 21–33, here: p. 32.

lowest common denominator. Hence, many of its conclusions remain at a superficial level. The division among partners on the future of A SEM is reflected by the long debates on whether a) A SEM needs an institutional base in the form of a secretariat, and b) it has to overcome its informality and produce practical outcomes. Supporters for either of these two approaches – remaining an informal dialogue process vs. striving for tangible results – can be found within the Asian and European grouping. Although some Asian partners generally wonder more about the added value of ASEM if no direct results can be achieved.

“ASEM has to address inherent challenges in order to show its benefits and added value.”

The fact that A SEM and its initiatives lack any form of implementing power and rely on the good will of the national governments to act, has understandably raised questions regarding ASEM's relevance. It is often seen to only pay lip service and to be greatly inefficient. This is reinforced by the fact that challenges, which ASEM partners have debated about for a long time, still exist and that only small steps have been taken to adequately address them. This criticism and the demand for ASEM itself to produce tangible outcomes reflect a misunderstanding of A SEM's nature and mandate as an informal multilateral dialogue process. Instead, by focusing only on tangible outcomes, which are difficult to achieve, critics could create a capability-expectations gap and set ASEM up for failure.

Since officials of the participating states lead the process, support for A SEM might also fluctuate depending on the political leadership and, due to the frequent changes in personnel, institutional memory can be difficult

to maintain. For instance, only last year, a number of experienced and highly supportive senior officials changed in Ireland, New Zealand, and Myanmar and Mongolia, the hosts of the last Foreign Ministers' Meeting and A SEM Summit respectively.

ASEM's fast growth and its initiation of many projects in different policy areas has resulted in a so-called silo approach with often limited cross-thematic exchanges. In light of the increasing complexity in terms of challenges and the added advantage of exploring interdisciplinary solutions, this division between the various policy fields and initiatives hinders ASEM from achieving its full potential and developing comprehensive prevention as well as response measures.

Although A SEM has declared its goal to establish connectivity in all its dimensions by offering a platform that promotes alliances on a political, economic, socio-cultural, and people-to-people level, ASEM still lacks recognition. Many people have never heard of the Asia-Europe Meeting nor are they aware of the vastness of the process. Then again, some people who do know about

ASEM perceive it as yet another project of the political elites that lacks democratic legitimisation and that has no benefit for the people.

Particularly in the context of the aforementioned oversupply of fora, it is important for ASEM to avoid overlaps and remain aware of possible duplications. ASEM must critically examine its current status and implement reforms so as not to lose the confidence of its partners in the process. If reforms are carried out, the format can function as an agenda-setter for Europe-Asia relations, raise awareness, and promote collaborative projects to tackle

many of today's transnational challenges.

For ASEM, it will be important to decide whether it wants to remain a forum for dialogue driven by senior officials or evolve into becoming a proper tool for global governance and multilateralism. Recent developments indicate that ASEM could play a more active role. Since the eleventh Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) in New Delhi in 2013,⁵ ASEM has taken steps towards providing avenues that may deliver more tangible outcomes through new models such as ad-hoc coalitions and thematic working groups. This enables smaller groups of member countries, who are willing to take action, to press ahead with certain cooperation areas, and this in turn helps to prevent political deadlocks. Within such an issue-based leadership model, the large number of partners and their diversity can actually be a strength as countries can work on a wide range of topics complementing their individual capacities. This approach was re-affirmed at the ASEM Summit 2014 in Milan, the FMM 2015 in Luxembourg, and the Ulaanbaatar Declaration in 2016,⁶ but has yet to be operationalised. The 2016 Summit identified many areas for concrete collaboration such as counter-terrorism, maritime security and safety, piracy, drug and human trafficking, migration, cyber security, energy, disaster management, and higher education. Leaders also affirmed that ASEM must be multi-dimensional and people-centred and should promote both multilateralism as well as a rules-based order. This approach seems feasible to strike a

balance between the different perspectives adopted by the partners. A SEM would be able to remain an open and informal process with comprehensive dialogue, promoting cooperation, and fostering trust at the politically highest level of the leaders. Nevertheless, it would expand on this using an action-oriented approach with more concrete outcomes in the sectoral arena through, for example, joint exercises, sharing of best practices, and capacity building. Yet, it remains to be seen whether countries participating in those working groups will actually implement policy changes. ASEM could, for example, form a group of experts who can assist in the implementation process. In 2016, the ASEM leaders also established the Pathfinder Group on Connectivity (A PGC)⁷ for the duration of two years. It defined connectivity and developed a work plan on how soft as well as hard connectivity can be achieved. The last summits witnessed the introduction of a leaders' retreat. ASEM can also use this to facilitate bilateral exchanges and unilateral approaches.⁸

As a second step, it will be important for ASEM to tackle not only specific issues within the wider framework, but to not lose sight of the bigger picture, too. While the softer ad-hoc coalition and network style will allow ASEM to be more practical, less bureaucratic, and focus on selected topics, the partners must promote cross-fertilisation between those thematic areas. Consequently, ASEM will be able to develop holistic responses and solutions to complex as well as transnational, and

5 Cf. ASEM 2013: Chair's Statement of the 11th ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting "ASEM: Bridge to Partnership for Growth and Development", Nov 2013, in: <http://bit.ly/2QCDf8p> [18 Dec 2018].

6 Cf. ASEM 2016: Ulaanbaatar Declaration on AsiaEurope Meeting (ASEM) into the Third Decade, Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, 15-16 July 2016, in: <https://europa.eu/ImM84Qd> [18 Dec 2018].

7 Cf. ASEM 2016: 11th ASEM Summit "20 Years of A SEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity", Chair's Statement, Jul 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2QqDFxN> [7 Jun 2018].

8 Cf. Islam, Shada 2016: A SEM at a Crossroad: A Mix of Ideas and Connectivity will Revive A SEM in the Next Decade, in: Gorawantschy, Beatrice / Sarmah, Megha / Rueppel, Patrick (eds.): The Age of Connectivity– ASEM and Beyond, KAS, Singapore, pp. 1–15, here: pp. 8–9.

interconnected challenges affecting a multitude of policy fields.

“As an informal meeting that facilitates concrete actions among its members, ASEM can be a blueprint for multilateralism in the 21st century.”

ASEM also needs to address its lack of visibility and increase support for the process. The initiation of A SEM Day – also agreed upon at the Ulaanbaatar Summit⁹ and first celebrated in 2017 – is certainly a step in the right direction. Delivering concrete results deriving from discussions at the ASEM level will automatically further increase visibility and legitimacy. Besides improving the economic, political, social, and cultural relations between the two continents, ASEM could set and ensure high standards, for instance, on environmental protection, social issues, protection of intellectual property, transparency in procurements, and the sustainability of projects. Through this, A SEM can limit the repercussions stemming from globalisation, which are one of the many factors contributing to the rise of populism. While it may be too early to discuss an A SEM-wide free trade agreement (FTA), partners could look for opportunities to facilitate easier trade and support businesses, especially small and medium enterprises.

Within its framework, A SEM could also contribute to more sub-regional cooperation since countries located in the same geographic area can coordinate and collaborate on the preparation and potential implementation of ASEM agreements. This potential was already visible in the late 1990s and the following A SEAN Plus Three initiative. A SEM

could then function as a hub that links up these sub-regions and other multilateral fora in which many of its partners participate as well. If ASEM develops this hub capacity, it can become a marketplace for ideas due to its broad participation of stakeholders from all walks of life. Instead of forcing binding rules and agreements, for which ASEM's ability to domestically enforce them remains limited – as is the case for most other multilateral approaches – and which might cause political gridlocks, A SEM may be the hybrid resulting in concrete actions among selected partners in ever changing groupings. This is all while maintaining trust and confidence in the wider circle of partners, working towards a common goal. ASEM would not be the place for practical solutions itself, but rather the platform where ideas are developed, convergence of interests takes place, and where trust is built. This in itself is a deliverable. Ultimately, such exchanges can produce tangible results when the ideas are implemented in mini- or bilateral formats, or even domestically – something that will also support the principle of subsidiarity. This enabling and supporting character could very well be the future role of multilateral fora in a more volatile and truly multipolar world – thus making A SEM a blueprint for the 21st century.

ASEM as an Avenue to Promote the ASEAN-EU Partnership

In the current environment, ASEM may also be able to provide the most promising avenue for broader EU- ASEAN multilateralism beyond bi-regional cooperation, but rather jointly within a wider context. This is the declared goal of the Joint Statement on the 40th

9 Cf. ASEM 2016, n. 6.

Anniversary of the

Establishment of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations¹⁰ the revised Plan of Action¹¹ adopted at the EU-ASEAN Post-Ministerial Conference in 2017, and the Global Strategy of the European Union on Foreign and Security Policy (EUGS).¹² These documents corroborate that the two regional bodies are not only relevant to their specific region and member states, but have the potential to be of strategic relevance in the international system. This can be achieved by not only looking at their own and mutual benefits, but by forming a partnership to contribute to a rules-based international order.¹³

“ASEAN and the EU should work together and coordinate their positions within ASEM in order to have an impact beyond biregional cooperation.”

In light of this goal, the EU and ASEAN have the potential to use ASEM as a tool to foster effective multilateralism through the approach developed since 2013. They could even multilateralise initiatives such as the BRI and AIIB in order to generate mutual benefits without one-sided gains for the driving force behind them. Together – and as long as they main-

tain their unity, ASEAN and the EU are strong enough and have sufficient leverage to create a multilateral environment in which unilateral actions are more costly even for great powers. Since ASEM

is an ASEAN- and EU-driven initiative, the two regional organisations should work together and coordinate their positions in order to have an impact beyond bilateral and biregional cooperation. They could use ASEM to promote better understanding, develop a shared European-Asian vision for the future, and enhance practical cooperation on areas of common interest¹⁴ for which ASEM’s comprehensive structure and multi-stakeholder involvement provide a unique opportunity. All while jointly focussing on preventive diplomacy, confidence-building and discussions on strategic regional security threats within the ARF, which is the only other multilateral forum of the so-called ASEAN centrality approach of which the EU is a partner. In this way, overlaps between the two fora could be avoided or at least minimised.

Conclusion

Despite the huge geographic distance between Asia and Europe, both are directly and indirectly affected by the political developments in the other region. This provides vital opportunities for collaboration and dialogue between the two regions. Many Asian and European countries are strong supporters of a rules-based multilateral system and should

10 Cf. European External Action Service 2017: Joint Statement on the 40th Anniversary of the Establishment of ASEAN-EU Dialogue Relations – ASEAN-EU 40th Anniversary: Together Towards a Strategic Partnership, Aug 2017, in: <https://europa.eu/Ind49cx> [7 Jun 2018].

11 Cf. ASEAN 2017: ASEAN-EU Plan of Action (2018–2022), Aug 2017, in: <http://bit.ly/2E7dKW2> [7 Jun 2018].

12 Cf. European Union 2016: Shared Vision, Common Action: A Stronger Europe – A Global Strategy for the European Union’s Foreign and Security Policy, Jun 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2rcyMdh> [7 Jun 2018].

13 Cf. Yeo 2017, n. 4, p. 21.

14 The Plan of Action 2018–2022, for instance, identified free trade, terrorism, cyber threats, transnational crime, maritime security, migration, climate change and crisis management as such policy fields.

work together in order to establish a cooperative environment with preventive arrangements to contain insecurities, build trust, and increase predictability.

However, as outlined in this paper, Europe and Asia are confronted by an environment that is becoming increasingly hostile to international collaboration and multilateral engagements. Growing volatility in the international

system with more assertive great powers that focus on national interests as well as unilateral approaches with one-sided gains, and that have a limited willingness for concessions and coordination, pose a severe threat to multilateralism.

Yet, the signing of free trade agreements by the European Union with Japan and Singapore, respectively, are strong commitments to the liberal world order. A joint communiqué, recently released by the ASEAN foreign ministers to uphold the rules-based multilateral order,¹⁵ as well as the commitments by European leaders¹⁶ to this system, show the importance countries in both regions attach to this approach, and send a strong political signal. It further underscores that Germany and Europe have a more than willing partner in Asia to secure the future of multilateralism. This is also the case for ASEM, which forms the only multilateral track for Asia-Europe cooperation. It thus has a clear geographic focus, and has so far been able to avoid some of the

great power dynamics that can be observed in the ARF and EAS.

This is not the only reason why we should be confident about ASEM playing a more crucial role in the future. With the enhanced focus on connectivity, the development of ad-hoc thematic coalitions, and identification of common interests, the dialogue process was able to form a unique framework for collaboration and possibly set an example for a 21st century form of multilateralism. Its holistic, multi-track approach, incorporating almost all important stakeholders, offers promising opportunities to lead the bi-regional relations and contribute to a Europe-Asia driven multilateral order.

15 Cf. Salleh, Nur Asyiqin Mohamad 2018: ASEAN members commit to upholding multilateral system, *The Straits Times*, 3 Aug 2018, in: <http://str.sg/od82> [10 Aug 2018]

16 Cf. Delattre, Françoise 2018: France and Germany will fight to preserve multilateralism, 12 Aug 2018, in: <https://on.ft.com/2PcGCNU> [15 Aug 2018]; *Business Times* 2018: EU an avid supporter of rules-based global system, 2 Aug 2018, in <http://bit.ly/2SizaCP> [15 Aug 2018].



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ASEAN in ASEM: The Socialisation of the ASEAN Way?

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Introduction

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is an inter-governmental process established in 1996 to foster dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. The establishment of ASEM was driven by geo-economic and strategic interests. By the early 1990s, East Asia, Europe and North America had emerged as three dominant poles in the world's economic system.² The three prosperous regions accounted for approximately 85 to 95 percent of global production and trade, finance, foreign investment flow and new technology development.

As the 1990s progressed, the Cold War was receding from international politics, which was increasingly characterised by globalisation and regionalism. As a result, the tripolar relations between East Asia, Europe and North America moved from basic concerns regarding inter-triad power competition towards a more cooperative focused ground. Under President Bill Clinton, the US adopted a more proactive approach toward the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) forum with a plan to create a transpacific free trade and investment zone. In December 1995, the US and the European Union (EU) adopted the New Transatlantic Agenda, which set in motion a new era in transatlantic relations. Clearly, transatlantic ties which were already quite strong gained more momentum and at the same time transpacific cooperation became increasingly dynamic.

However, the Asia-Europe link of the triangle by comparison was relatively weak. Thus, the perceived original need for this inter-regional relationship primarily arose within this glob-

al-tripolar context. This gave a birth to ASEM. The EU's main motivations for promoting ASEM rested on its anxieties over the prospect of potential geo-economic marginalisation in a transpacific-dominated world economy, as a result of President Clinton's increasing enthusiasm about APEC. In the 1994 *Toward a New Asia Strategy*, the European Commission (EC) noticed that "the rise of Asia is dramatically changing the world balance of economic power... The Union needs as a matter of urgency to strengthen its economic presence in Asia in order to maintain its leading role in the world economy."³

Similarly, East Asia's own motivation for promoting the ASEM idea was to counterbalance American influence in the region and to diversify their international economic relations, especially in the aftermath of the creation of the Single European Market. For the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), ASEM would further promote ASEAN centrality as it adds a new layer to its existing cooperation mechanisms, including APEC and ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), which centred on ASEAN.⁴

More importantly, ASEAN's role in ASEM has not solely laid in its economic and geopolitical influence but in its ideas and identity, known as the ASEAN way, in shaping the inception of ASEM and in influencing the course of ASEM's institutional development.

Having said that, a large volume of scholarly literature on regionalism and inter-regional cooperation over the past three decades has been influenced and inspired by the EU.

2 Christopher M. Dent, "The Asia-Europe Meeting and Inter-Regionalism: Toward a Theory of Multilateral Utility," *Asian Survey* Vol. 44, No.2 (2004): 213-236.

3 European Commission, "Toward a New Asian Strategy," 13 July 1994. Accessed 25 July 2019: <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/legal-content/EN/TXT/PDF/?uri=CELEX:51994DC0314&from=EN>

4 S. Jayakumar, *Diplomacy: A Singapore Experience* (Singapore: Straits Times Press, 2011).

These studies, exemplified by the literature on Europe's normative power and the EU's norm-diffusion practices in international relations. Departing from the Eurocentric perspective, this chapter, explores the role of ASEAN in shaping ASEM. More precisely, it attempts to investigate the extent to which the ASEAN Way has been socialised in the ASEM process.

The ASEAN Way

Since its inception on 8 August 1967, ASEAN has generated many optimistic narratives and brought hope to 650 million people in Southeast Asia and many more outside the region. Mahbubani and Sng even called ASEAN the "miracle" of the East.⁵ The regional grouping has promoted peace and prosperity to a once troubled region and proven to be the most relevant regional institution in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific at large. ASEAN is an important testimony that countries with different cultures and civilisations as well as bitter historical antagonism can live together in peaceful coexistence and a shared future. Despite diversity, the sense of identity and community has been nurtured among ten ASEAN member states. Diversity has been harnessed to be the strength of this inter-governmental organisation.

ASEAN has provided a reliable security shield for its member states to protect its independence and sovereignty. Mutual respect, mutual consultation, mutual understanding and mutual interest have become the norms and strengths of ASEAN in sustaining a platform or mechanism for dialogue and trust building. The success of ASEAN rests on its open, in-



ASEAN nowadays consists of 10 countries and was created on member of ASEAN on the 30th of April 1999.

clusive and outward-looking nature. ASEAN's success has been partly due to a number of legal norms which have roots in conventional Westphalian international relations. Those legal norms include non-use of force and peaceful settlement of dispute, the principle of non-interference, regional autonomy and collective self-reliance, and the rejection of an ASEAN military pact.⁶ Those norms have gradually enshrined in various ASEAN official documents, including the 1967 Bangkok Declaration, the 1971 Kuala Lumpur Declaration on the Zone of Peace, Freedom and Neutrality, the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), and the ASEAN Charter.

ASEAN's identity has also been formed by its self-perception as the centre of Asia-Pacific regionalism. Such a role has been widely ac-

5 Kishore Mahbubani and Jeffery Sng, *The ASEAN Miracle: A Catalyst for Peace* (Singapore: Ridge Books, 2017).

6 Amitav Acharya, *Constructing a Security Community in Southeast Asia: ASEAN and the Problem of Regional Order* (London: Routledge, 2014).



the 08th of August 1976. The Kingdom of Cambodia became a

knowledge and appreciated by all of its dialogue partners, mainly due to ASEAN's convening power in the multilateral diplomacy of the region. The strength of ASEAN does not only rely on intra-regional unity but also the support from all dialogue partners. In fact, ASEAN neither poses security threat to any countries nor imposes world-view on others. Over the past decades, ASEAN has cultivated close cooperation with countries and organizations outside the region. As a result, the concept of ASEAN Centrality constitutes one of the prominent guiding principles of ASEAN's external relations. Although, the notion has been contested, ASEAN Centrality means that the regional grouping lies and should remain at the centre of regional institutions in the Asia-Pacific, particularly through ASEAN-led mechanisms, namely the ARF, ASEAN-Plus Three (APT) and the East Asia Summit (EAS).

However, what is unique about ASEAN is the cultural and social norms – known as the ASEAN Way – that have distinguished the regional grouping from other international actors. Although, the meaning of the ASEAN Way is contested, the term is commonly used by ASEAN leaders and scholars to describe the pattern of interaction and to distinguish it from Western forms of multilateralism. According to Acharya, the key characteristics of the ASEAN Way include informality, inclusiveness, intensive consultations based on consensus and less on binding agreements and regulatory frameworks.⁷ These norms and principles have been contested and simultaneously enhanced. Against the odds, these normative underpinnings still guide ASEAN's internal interactions and its relations with the outside world given changes in regional and international dynamics over the past decades.

Warleigh-Lack notes that "ASEAN's socialisation impact is rather impressive."⁸ Throughout ASEAN's evolution, new states have joined this regional organisation and adopted its norms. Moreover, ASEAN has succeeded in norm exportation to third countries. It has also had an impact on the foreign policies of the regional powers, especially countries in Northeast Asia, including China, Japan and South Korea.

ASEM's Soft Institution: The Socialisation of the ASEAN Way?

Generally, international institutions are established and designed to allow states to work together for particular reasons. Institutional

⁷ Ibid

⁸ Alex Warleigh-Lack, "The EU, ASEAN and APEC in Comparative Perspective," in Murray (ed.), *Europe and Asia: Regions in Flux* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008): p.34-35.

design can be a deliberate choice, not a coincidental arrangement, decided by national governments. Koremenos, Lipson and Snidal argue that “states use international institutions to further their own goals and they design institutions accordingly.”⁹ In addition to their influence on institutional design, states’ interests can also shape the course of international institutions. In this regard, Keohane (1988) suggests that the practice of sovereignty by states directly influences the evolution of the institution. Therefore, states choose or design the type of cooperation framework and may adjust it according to their needs in the course of the cooperation.

ASEM is no exclusion. The region-to-region relations between Asian and European countries in the ASEM framework are rather complex. The complexity of the inter-regional relations in ASEM, can be circumvented by the informal design of ASEM. ASEM partners have opted to design the inter-regional forum that to be less institutionalised. This choice is depicted in the first ASEM Summit Chairman’s Statement which read as follow: “The Meeting agreed that inter-sessional activities are necessary although they need not be institutionalised... The Meeting furthermore agreed that follow-up actions to be undertaken by the participants to the ASEM will be based on consensus.”

This might be a result of ASEM’s complexity. ASEM partners consist of not only a large number of countries in Asia and Europe but also a variety of attachments of those participating states to each other. After a series of enlargement, ASEM is currently comprised of 53 partners: 21 Asian countries, including all

ASEAN member states, 28 EU member states, Norway and Switzerland, ASEAN Secretariat and European Union.

In addition to the increase in the number of ASEM partners, the complexity of relations in the ASEM process stems from the distinctive diversity embedded in the large number of participating countries. Asia and Europe have neither geographical proximity, nor cultural similarity. Moreover, ASEM consists of Asian and European groups that are different internally, particularly the former. Therefore, one can argue that the most important factor that helps the Asian and European countries to maintain the ASEM process is its informality.

The informality within ASEM allows leaders and other participants to freely discuss a wide range of topics and explore their common interests. Arguably, an informal forum is intended to create a relaxed atmosphere for meeting participants and to relieve them of any pressure to achieve any particular goals. Given the wide diversity among the ASEM partners, ranging from economic advancement to political values and cultural differences, the informality and the lack of regulatory mechanism also contribute to sustaining the ASEM process.

“The informality within ASEM allows leaders and other participants to freely discuss a wide range of topics and explore their common interests.”

ASEM’s soft institution might be a result of the socialization of the ASEAN Way in the inter-regional forum. Fitriani argues that ASEM was established as a loose institution without any binding mechanism as a precautionary meas-

⁹ Barbara Koremenos, Charles Lipson and Duncan Snidal, “Rational Design of International Institutions,” *International Organization* Vol.55, No.4 (2001): 761-99, p.762.

ure to anticipate differences among ASEM partners in political values, economic aspects and socio-cultural life and more importantly to adjust the ASEAN way.¹⁰ Despite frequent criticism of the ASEAN way, EU countries seem to tolerate ASEM adopting similar principles, namely informality, non-binding, consensus and inclusiveness.

First, the ASEM institution is characterised by a remarkable informality, which has been written explicitly in various ASEM documents. ASEM has persistently maintained the informal form of institution. This is perhaps due to the role of ASEAN member states in establishing ASEM and in shaping its process as the informality of the ASEM institution is similar to that of the ASEAN institution. More noticeably, in the course of building ASEM, the Asia and European leaders found the need for a more effective working mechanism. They then suggested a series of inter-governmental meetings and adopted the 2000 Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AEWCF) that includes the working method of the ASEM process. Despite a coordinating mechanism being stipulated, the ASEM institution has been kept informal. ASEM leaders have kept reaffirming the principle of informality in various ASEM documents. In fact, ASEM has no secretariat.

Second, non-binding principle through consensus has been the normative underpinning of ASEM since its inauguration in 1996. The Chairman Statement of the First ASEM Summit states that “the Meeting further agreed that follow-up actions to be undertaken jointly by the participants to the ASEM will based on consensus.” These characteristics are very likely influenced by ASEAN. In this regard, Fitri-

ani claims that:

The ASEM institution has been built in accordance with the needs of the Southeast Asian countries, that is, inter-regional relations with the needs of the Southeast Asian countries, that is, inter-regional relations managed by an informality and non-binding principle. Those characteristics mirror the influence of ASEAN on the ASEM institution.¹¹

Indeed, ASEM seems to tolerate the Southeast countries to bring in their ASEAN Way, which have helped to maintain ASEM cooperation. The accommodation of the ASEAN institutional style into the ASEM process encourages the Southeast Asian countries to accept and support ASEM. Moreover, the informality of ASEM institution creates flexibility while the non-binding principle seems to reduce the cost of maintaining cooperation while opening up opportunities for the ASEM partners to develop different kinds of strategic relations.

Third, ASEAN has also promoted inclusiveness in the ASEM enlargement with direct implication on the principles of equal sovereignty and non-interference. The process of Myanmar’s accession to ASEM is a good illustration of the role of ASEAN in shaping the ASEM process. The EU’s concern about human right issue in Myanmar once dominated the political dialogue in ASEM, especially between ASEAN and the EU. Historically, Myanmar’s human rights problem was a key obstacle in ASEM-EU relations. The suppression of the democratisation movement in the country since the early 1990s had provoked international criticism, including from the EU. Asian ASEM countries, however, rejected Western political intervention

10 Evi Fitriani, *Southeast Asians and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): State’s Interests and Institution’s Longevity* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, 2014).

11 Ibid, p.98

and urged that the ASEAN Way is more applicable to the Myanmar case. This issue almost created a deadlock during the 2014 ASEM enlargement. Preceding the 2004 ASEM Summit in Hanoi, the EU unilaterally determined that while ASEM had to accept the EU's new member countries, the inter-regional forum could not automatically accept ASEAN's new member states, especially Myanmar which joined ASEM in 1997. In the 2003 New Partnership with Southeast Asia, the EU stated that:

*The EU and ASEM partners, in particular those of Southeast Asia, will have to meet the challenge of their respective enlargement in time for the 2004 Hanoi Summit. In this regard, it is encouraging to note that the members of ASEAN have recently and publicly expressed their support to the resuming of the national reconciliation process in Burma/Myanmar. Both sides will strive to avoid letting the question of the participation of Burma/Myanmar endanger the ASEM process itself.*¹²

However, the Asian ASEM side argued that, if ten EU new members "were to be accepted automatically as ASEM partners, then so should new ASEAN members which consisted of Cambodia, Laos, and Myanmar. In March 2004, the informal ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting reached a common position that "We did agree... that no political conditions be attached on their admission to ASEM." Prime Minister Hun Sen also mentioned that Cambodia would not join ASEM unless the two other ASEAN members were accepted at the same time. To the disappointment of many Europeans, Myanmar was admitted to ASEM

at the Hanoi Summit. In this connection, Fitriani articulates the view that the Myanmar case should not be perceived as a power game between ASEAN and the EU but as "a learning process in which the EU countries were willing to learn and respect the perspectives of their counterparts" in Asia.¹³

Finally, ASEAN lexicons have increasingly used in the ASEM process. For instance, the three pillars of the ASEAN Community, namely ASEAN Political and Security Community, ASEAN Economic Community and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, have become the pillar of the ASEM cooperation. Moreover, ASEAN's concept of connectivity – institutional, physical, and people-to-people connectivity projects – has become a priority of ASEM. During the 12th ASEM Summit in Brussels in 2018, ASEM Leaders underlined "the link between ASEM connectivity and sustainable development for achieving the 2030 Agenda... underlined the shared interests of all ASEM partners in strengthening Europe-Asia sustainable connectivity across ASEM's three pillars, as a means of bringing countries, people and societies closer together."

Future Prospects of ASEAN's Role in ASEM

The future role of ASEAN in ASEM will depend not only on the EU's perception of ASEAN but also on ASEAN's role in constructing an Asian identity within ASEM. The changes in the EU's perception of ASEAN have contributed to reshaping the EU's material interest in and behaviours towards Southeast Asia. Traditionally, the EU's perception of ASEAN was rather negative due to the fact that ASEAN laid at the

12 European Commission, "A New Partnership with Southeast Asia," Com (2003) 399/4. Accessed 23 July 2019: http://eeas.europa.eu/archives/docs/library/publications/2004_seasia_en.pdf

13 Fitriani, Southeast Asians and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), p.75.



bottom of the EU's hierarchy of external relations. It was due to the EU's self-perception as a norm-entrepreneur in regionalism and global governance while ASEAN as a norm-recipient.

However, there has been a major change in the EU's perception of ASEAN since 2012. Nuttin pointed out that the EU "shifted a different gear and placed ASEAN firmly on its radar screen."¹⁴ In July 2012, the EU acceded to the TAC and adopted the Plan of Action to strengthen the ASEAN-EU enhanced partnership. In May 2015, the EU adopted a Joint Communication on its relations with ASEAN which stated that the EU has a strategic interest in strengthening its relations with ASEAN because "ASEAN is the heart of the efforts to build a more robust regional security order in the wider Asia-Pacific."¹⁵ Similarly, in its 2017

report, the European Parliament considered ASEAN as "one of the world's most dynamic and fastest-growing region ... a strong advocate of multilateralism... strategically located in international politics."¹⁶

These changes in perception imply that ASEAN's economic and geopolitical role, as well as its socio-cultural norms have incrementally penetrated the EU's understanding of ASEAN. A challenge, however, is that the set of values and norms that ASEAN and the EU advocate are sometimes incompatible. Although the EU has recently adopted a pragmatic approach towards ASEAN, one has to bear in mind that the normative underpinnings of ASEAN differ from those of the EU. Whereas the EU embraces liberal democratic values such as human rights, the rule of law and good governance, ASEAN stresses the norms of non-interference, respect for state sovereignty. On top of that, the EU has not provided ASEAN a co-

14 Xavier Nuttin, *The Future of EU-ASEAN Relations* (Brussels: European Parliament Think Tank, 2017). Accessed 23 July 2019: [http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/578043/EXPO_STU\(2017\)578043_EN.pdf](http://www.europarl.europa.eu/RegData/etudes/STUD/2017/578043/EXPO_STU(2017)578043_EN.pdf)

15 European Commission, "Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council: The EU and ASEAN: A Partnership with a Strategic Purpose," 18 May 2015. Accessed 24 July 2019: [https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/abaf503d-fd58-11e4-a4c8-](https://publications.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/abaf503d-fd58-11e4-a4c8-01aa75ed71a1/language-en)

01aa75ed71a1/language-en

16 European Parliament, "On EU Political Relations with ASEAN," 28 June 2017. Accessed 23 July 2019: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-8-2017-0243_EN.html

herent message and clear strategy to ASEAN. Some member states of ASEAN do not quite understand what the EU wants to achieve and what role it wants to play in the region. If the EU desires to promote liberal democratic values, it should do so fair and square without double-standards to countries in the region. If the EU wants to promote its strategic and geo-economic interests in the Asia-Pacific, it should not do so under the guise of democratic values.

ASEAN's role in ASEM will also depend on the relevance of ASEAN in the wider Asia-Pacific. In fact, while external pressure from European participants in the ASEM process encouraged a more solid voice of Asian participants, the driving stimulus to group among Asian participants can also come from within. There were also cultural differences in the interactions in ASEM. The general perception within the Asian ASEM side is that the Europeans tend to behave openly whereas the Asians are more reserved and likely to group among Asians. As a result, Asian participants prefer to mingle with other Asian people at ASEM forums because they are more familiar with them. Lee and Park argue that through inter-regional forums, such as ASEM, Asian countries established an Asian identity.¹⁷ Similarly, Gilson and Yeo suggest that the Asian coordinating mechanism of the ASEM process has helped create self-identification of "we" among Asian participants as their European counterparts acted as the "other".¹⁸

So far, ASEAN has played an important coordinating role not only within the Asian ASEM side but also in the regionalism and multilateral cooperation in the Asia-Pacific through ASEAN-led frameworks such as the APT, EAS, and ARF. Therefore, in order to promote ASEAN's role in ASEM, ASEAN needs to maintain its central role in regionalism in the Asia-Pacific. It is increasingly a challenging task due to the rise of regional powers, such as China and India, and the great power rivalry in the region. Within the context of increasing geopolitical rivalry, it is more crucial for ASEAN member states to stay united and collectively address structural risks and challenges. Together, ASEAN can ward off adverse impacts from the great power rivalry – especially by upholding its neutrality and implementing a collective hedging strategy to mitigate mounting geopolitical risks. Collectively, ASEAN can build an open, transparent, inclusive, effective and rules-based international order and ensure that everyone will fairly benefit regional integration and community building process.

“Therefore, in order to promote ASEAN's role in ASEM, ASEAN needs to maintain its central role in regionalism in the Asia-Pacific.”

Conclusion

The evolution of ASEM over the last two decades revealed some features of interaction between ASEAN and other ASEM partners. ASEM has emerged as an inter-regional forum espousing the principles of informality, inclusiveness, non-binding, and equal sovereignty. ASEM's soft institution might be shaped by the complexity of inter-regional relations between Asia and Europe with distinctive diver-

17 Jung-Hoon Lee and Jin Park, "The Role of Regional Identity in Asia-Europe Relations with Special Reference to ASEM," *Global Economic Review*, Vol.30, No.3 (2001): 19-33.

18 Julie Gilson and Lay Hwee Yeo, "Collective Identity-Building through Trans-regionalism: ASEM and East Asian Regional Identity," in Stokhof, Velde and Yeo (eds.), *The Eurasian Space: Far more than two continents* (Singapore: Institute of Southeast Asian Studies and International Institute for Asian Studies, 2004).

sity embedded in the large number of partner countries.

ASEM's institutional characteristics are very likely influenced by ASEAN and its member states through the socialisation of the ASEAN Way, which includes informality, inclusiveness, intensive consultations based on consensus and less on binding agreements and regulatory frameworks. The ASEAN Way has provided a comfort for Asian ASEM partners to take part in regionalism and inter-regionalism. ASEAN has also convinced the European ASEM partners that the ASEAN Way can be an alternative approach to regionalism when there is a need to bridge differences between participating countries and to accommodate their varying interests.



Reading time: 17 minutes*

Prospect of ASEM: A Bet on EU and ASEAN as Possible Pillars in Asian (Maritime) Security

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He completed his Ph.D. at Sciences Po (Paris) in 2007. His last book is entitled *Chez les pirates d'Indonésie* [Among the Indonesian Pirates] (Fayard, 2011). He has also co-directed *Asie du l'Est et du Sud-est : de l'émergence à la puissance* [East and Southeast Asia: from Emergence to Power] (Ellipses, 2015) and the special issue of *Monde Chinois-Nouvelle Asie* on China and Southeast Asia (Eska, 2018).

Introduction

Asia emerged not only along a tectonic rift but above all on a geopolitical one. Asia keeps balancing between its East and its West, between the continent and the sea, between MacKinder and Mahan; in short, between Europe (and Russia!) and the Pacific. The duet “Asia-Europe” (for example in “ASEM”) had “Asia-Pacific” as a rival in most of the diplomatic fora since the 1990s (for example in “CSCAP”, “APEC” and “APR”).³ It has now to deal with the growing “Indo-Pacific” wave, on which the world seems to focus. As a symbol, the EAS (East Asia Summit) now follows the ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) yearly summits, without any European countries or EU (European Union) representatives. Besides, while European historians and anthropologists still choose Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular to conduct field research (cf. SOAS in London, EHESS in Paris, Goethe-Universität in Frankfurt)⁴, it is slightly more difficult to find European political scientists, because they are mostly more interested.

What does it mean for the future of ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting)? Is it definitely out-dated? Would it be the ineluctable “move of history”, echoing the geopolitical drift from the Atlantic to the Pacific and highlighted by André Malraux (1901-1976) in the 1970s, among others?

Not so sure. Raymond Aron (1905-1983), who was always concerned by nuance and balance, rejected this kind of fast historical conclusions and, indeed, Europe has still a lot to contrib-

ute in the Indo-Pacific (as well as Indo-Pacific powers interfere sometimes in Europe). Actually, it is no more only a matter of distance, physical borders or direct relationships but also a matter of values and global influence. Concretely, some Indo-Pacific countries are more and more tempted to go beyond the China-Quad dilemma, through newer partnerships and bridges across the geopolitical areas. Previously, the ASEAN States opted for the “minilateralism” to take over a failed regionalism in security issues, like the Haze in 2015-2017 or even terrorism⁵ among other challenges; for instance, littoral states, which felt directly concerned by piracy and armed robbery against ships, did not expect anything from the ASEAN secretary; they preferred to take their own initiatives to set up patrols in the Malacca Straits in the 2000s and in the Sulu Sea in the late 2010s. Now, due to the possible interference of peripheral powers (like the Chinese and American, both in the Malacca Straits and the Sulu Seas, between 2004 and 2019), is it time for something like a “maxilateralism”, across the traditional regional spheres, to by-pass both Washington and Beijing ascendancies? Similarly, after the fascination (to choose as the main diplomatic partner either China or USA) and the hedging (to satisfy both China and USA) – is it time (especially after the last two Shangri La Dialogues and Lee Hsien Loong’s speech in June 2019) for independence (to follow neither China nor USA)?

In this strategic game, what can Europe – i.e., in this text, Brussels, the European Union, and not its members – offer to Asian states? In the longer term, is it an opportunity for regionalist actors like ASEAN to get a second wind and

3 Respectively “Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific”, “Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation” and “Asia-Pacific Roundtable

4 Respectively “School of Oriental and African Studies” and “Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales” or School for Advanced Studies in the Social Sciences.

5 In spite of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism (ACCT) which came into force in 2011.

new energy? The EU is definitely very active for trade, economy, culture, education and – sometimes – human rights, especially within the ASEM. But what about the security sphere – even according to a broad definition (like the United Nations “human security”, which focus more on the individuals than the states)? Is there anything (concrete) to expect from Brussels, on this field, beyond the numerous so-called “strategies” and “reports”?

This paper argues that there has always been an underestimated and structural legitimacy for the EU to be an actor in Asian security (1.). Based on it and because of the current diplomatic conjuncture, Brussels can now reach a new stage within the security fora (2.). In this wake, some promising avenues can be identified as relevant diplomatic paths for stronger partnerships and to make the relationships more obvious for the external observers (3.).

Legitimacy for the EU to be a Growing Actor within ASEM (Security)

The EU can shamelessly apply for a position of key strategic actor within ASEM in general and close to the ASEAN in particular. This is due less to its history – as colonisation and western languages cannot be used as an argument – or to its geography – in spite of the European Islands⁶ in this area – , than to, firstly, its political nature – surprisingly not so far from the ASEAN one, in a certain way, in spite of being sui generis – as well as, secondly, to its long term efforts from and to Jakarta.

ASEAN and the EU Have More in Common than Expected

The EU authorities published the 2018 Maritime Security Strategy reaffirming the importance of “promoting maritime multilateralism and the rule of law at sea, the universal application of [UNCLOS]” which is regarded as critical for maintaining a rules-based order at seas.⁷ In this document, the European Commission calls for five key areas for immediate action: 1) external action, 2) maritime awareness, surveillance and information sharing, 3) capability development and capacity sharing, 4) risk management, protection of critical maritime infrastructure and crisis response, 5) maritime security research and innovation, education and training.⁸ In the Southeast Asia context, the European Union is likely to reinforce its exchange of best practices but also streamline cooperation between EU agencies and ASEAN member states maritime security agencies. One of the European Union’s goals for the region is to promote multilateral cooperation between ASEAN countries but also to be a bridge amongst ASEAN countries when local political or diplomatic fights occurred between them. ASEAN nations and EU member states share the same challenges which can bring them closer. These challenges are IUU (Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated) fishing⁹ illegal migration, the threat of terrorist attacks, drug and illicit trafficking, smuggling (mainly cigarettes and wildlife across the straits), difficult coordination between a broad range of models to enforce law at sea¹⁰ and, last but

6 See the EU Overseas Countries and Territories (OCTs) like the French Réunion Island in the Indian Ocean, New-Caledonia and French Polynesia in the Pacific Ocean.

7 European Commission, “Maritime Security Strategy”, Maritime affairs committee of the European Commission, published on June 26, 2018, see: https://ec.europa.eu/maritimeaffairs/policy/maritime-security_en.

8 Ibid.

9 See the “Scallop war” in August 2018 when French and British fishermen clashed in the English Channel.

10 See for example the difference between the French

not least the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI – workers, loans, interference in domestic affairs, etc.). All these challenges have a maritime dimension. They also share some common principles and mechanisms designed with security.

At the international stage, the European Union is often criticized for being too weak diplomatically or military, relying heavily on the US worldwide military presence or NATO. These critics are somehow well-founded. However, in the context of Southeast Asia and ASEAN, it could be a strength. Indeed, despite lacking military power, the European Union is a significant international actor, especially with the solidarity of its member states and its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The European Union foreign policy approach is based on consensus and not supranationalism meaning that all member states keep their own diplomacy, except in some areas. On one hand, it may reassure ASEAN countries in that the European Union does not have an aggressive or unpredictable foreign policy when China and the United States may have one. On the other, the European Union message can be weaker compared to other international actors. For instance, in the past, Hungary and Greece supported or did not comment on Chinese actions in the South China Sea.¹¹ Both countries benefit from Chinese infrastructure investments, especially under the BRI programs. One of the biggest fears of the European Union is to lose its capability to

speak with one voice.

“ASEAN nations and EU member states share the same challenges which can bring them closer.”

Eventually, both organisations speak the same diplomatic and administrative language, through their respective commission or secretariat. Both are usually concerned by comprehensive and multidimensional approach – to associate patrol and development in coastal areas; both take time to meet and discuss, via ministers, senior officials and scholars: see the ASEAN-ISIS (Institutes of Strategic and International Studies) and the EU ISS (Institute for Security Studies) – which has restarted the EU-CSCAP committee in the mid-2010s, as a good way to facilitate dialogue – as well as the European Security and Defence College. Last, based on “variable geometry”, both organisations are also pragmatic enough to switch to “minilateralism” or specific missions, with contributions on a voluntary basis (cf. infra), if necessary or in case of emergency.

EU and ASEAN: From Words to Acts

Did Brussels turn its eyes to ASEAN *faute de mieux*? It is true that the EU focused primarily on China, in the early stages of its foreign policy, when it helped Beijing to join the WTO (World Trade Organisation). Nevertheless, in return, China quickly preferred to opt for bilateral relationships, either because of the structural weaknesses of the European institutions or to deal with weaker actors. Never mind: the EU focused on what it is at its best: peace processes. It took part into negotiations about Aceh in Indonesia and Mindanao in Southern Philippines; it helped Cambodia and Timor-Leste to raise (again) as proper, mature and sovereign states. In the wake of

“State Action at Sea”, under maritime prefects, and the proper coast-guards agencies in many other countries; or the difference between the Indonesian Bakamla (Maritime Security Agency), the MMEA (Malaysian Maritime Enforcement Agency) and the Philippine NCWC (National Coast Watch Center).

11 Alfred Gerstl, “The EU’s interest and policy towards East Asia maritime security”, *Maritime Issues*, published on October 26, 2018, see: <http://www.maritimeissues.com/politics/the-eu39s-interest-and-policy-towards-east-asia-maritime-security.html>.



The photo displays the South China Sea, which is of tremendous strategic importance to the global trade and market. It is currently subject to maritime territory disputes between Brunei, China, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Vietnam.

this diplomatic activity, it accessed to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in 2012 and joined the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) as a member.

Progressively, the EU became more familiar of the ASEAN. As Dr Eva Pejsova pointed out:

Since 2013, the EU held five rounds of EU-ASEAN High-Level Dialogues on Maritime Security Cooperation, [...] Maritime security, preventive diplomacy and mediation were the focus of EU-ASEAN Seminars on Security and Defence organised annually by the European Security and Defence College (ESDC) since 2014. Finally, the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI) is another platform dedicated to advance political-security integration of ASEAN, looking more specif-

*ically at fisheries policy, IUU fishing and marine natural environment.*¹²

The EUGS (EU Global Strategy) 2016 stressed the need to “build maritime capacities and support an ASEAN-led regional security architecture.” As a co-chair of the ARF ISM on Maritime Security, the EU has set up workshops on Maritime Law Enforcement, promoting best practice-sharing and concrete measures for reducing regional tensions, enhancing Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), land-sea and civil-military nexus (EU’s ‘comprehensive approach’ to maritime crisis management), and IUU fishing.¹³ In parallel, the CRIMARIO program¹⁴ includes Southeast Asian countries

¹² Eva Pejsova, “Increased Relevance for EU Policy and Actions in the South China Sea”, ISEAS-Perspective, 2019-52, 26 June 2019.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Critical Maritime Routes Indian Ocean Programme.

like Singapore.

Back to China: after the attempt to seduce Beijing, then – maybe – the deception or disillusion, Brussels must react. The EU, which positions itself as a normative superpower, is increasingly concerned by the PRC (People's Republic of China). It sees Beijing as a growing threat to the rules-based global order, which is Brussels' *raison d'être*. In results, although the comments by the European Commission following the decision by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in July 2016 regarding the Chinese activities in the South China Sea had been very cautious, times are changing. The EU becomes more vocal on this critical topic. And European think tanks are now advising for a stronger position on this specific matter and on the freedom of navigation,¹⁵ based on the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).

With such solid and diplomatic basements and because of the worrying context regarding the fundamentals and core values of the EU, Brussels has been urged to go one step further in its relationship with the ASEAN states.

Window of Opportunity to Go Further, with ASEAN as the Main Partner

Over the last years, the Southeast Asia maritime security environment has seen the increase of multiple risks. Piracy, transnational activities and terrorism in the maritime domain have been the norm for many years. Nowadays, they are also facing aggressive actions and strategies from State-nation such as the current Chinese activities in some wa-

ters. These activities are generating tensions and are requiring new approaches for ASEAN countries such as the increase of coordination between civilian agencies and the military or a comprehensive maritime domain awareness strategy. The new diplomatic context in the region gives today a unique opportunity to the EU to provide its experience, its expertise and its financial tool in the maritime security domain.

The Neutrality of ASEAN Countries is More and More Complex

The pragmatism of ASEAN States towards their foreign policies, especially their relationships with the so-called great powers – namely China and the United States – has become increasingly complex. They are facing more and more pressure from both sides to choose in which side they are.

During the 2019 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, Singaporean Prime Minister Lee emphasized the importance for ASEAN nations to stay out of the current global powers' competition.¹⁶ However, this strategy is more and more costly and could be a failure.¹⁷ Indeed, nowadays, some ASEAN countries have already chosen their major partner between China and the United States. For example, some countries such as Laos, Cambodia, or Myanmar fell into China's bosom. Others have close links with the United States such as Singapore or the Philippines, especially on security-defence relations. Singapore is a good example of the

15 Mathieu Duchâtel, François Godement, "Europe and 5G: the Huawei Case – Part 2", Policy Paper, Institut Montaigne, June 2019

16 Lee Hsien Loong, "Speech at the 2019 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue", Prime Minister's Office Singapore, published on May 31, 2019, see: <https://www.pmo.gov.sg/Newsroom/PM-Lee-Hsien-Loong-at-the-IISS-Shangri-La-Dialogue-2019>.

17 Bilahari Kausikan, "No sweet spot for Singapore in US-China tensions", The Straits Times, published on May 30, 2019, see: <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/no-sweet-spot-for-spore-in-us-china-tensions>.

current dilemma for ASEAN countries. Singaporean Prime Minister Lee suggested that Western powers should accept China's rise at the international stage and reach a compromise with China's aspiration to increase its international security role.¹⁸ The first trade partner of Singapore is China, meanwhile, the City-state's armed forces are close to the US with a "western-minded" system for security and defence issues. To stay neutral or to avoid disruptions, ASEAN countries may search for a third partner and reinforce their relations with it. The European Union is clearly in a strong position.

Great Powers Competition is the New Norm

The increase of competition between China and the United States is critical for the future of the European Union in Southeast Asia. The Trump administration is sending confusing signals to both Europeans (for instance with NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization) and Southeast Asian people (for instance with the Trans-Pacific partnership). However, the current US administration is reinforcing the feeling in Bruxelles that the European Union should play a strongest worldwide role in order to be a credible international actor, especially in the international security and maritime security domains. The US political – not military – influence in Europe is withdrawing, particularly to allow them in reinforcing their military presence in the Indo-Pacific region, a policy started from the Obama presidency. The European Union and its member states are obliged to take the Trump administration

foreign policy into account and to reinforce EU structure.

The New Unpredictability of the United States

Since the 2008 financial crisis, the Southeast region is the engine of worldwide economic growth. The so-called "European Union pivot" toward Asia should speed up, despite the fact that Asia in large is the second trade partner of the European Union nowadays.¹⁹ Most of Southeast Asia nations look the European continent as being a "permanent political crisis area".²⁰ The way how important issues in Europe such as sovereign debt, immigration, terrorism or Brexit are managed will have an impact on how Southeast Asian countries look at Europe and the European Union. For example, the Brexit will reduce the EU influence at the international stage, especially in security and defence issues the United Kingdom being a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council and a nuclear power (after Brexit, the only EU member state with both of these characteristics will be France). However, President Trump's actions at the international stage are boosting the EU's strategic interests and views in Southeast Asia. They should allow the EU to play a biggest role to promote good order in this region. For instance, for many experts, US acting defence secretary Patrick Shanahan performed a "poor speech" during the 2019 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, showing unassertiveness from the former Boeing employee.²¹ He clearly missed

18 Lee Hsien Loong, "Shangri-La Dialogue: Lee Hsien Loong on why US and China must avoid path of conflict", The Straits Times, published on June 1, 2019, see: <https://www.straitstimes.com/opinion/why-us-and-china-must-avoid-path-of-conflict-pm-lee>.

19 Jérémy Bachelier, « Enjeux et perspectives de la France en Asie du Sud-Est » (in French), Conseil Supérieur de la Formation et de la Recherche Stratégiques (CSFRS), published on December 6, 2017, see: <https://www.geostrategia.fr/documents/enjeux-et-perspectives-de-la-france-en-asie-du-sud-est-jeremy-bachelier/>.

20 Ibid.

21 Michael Fullilove, « Superpower scrutiny at Shangri-La », The

a note. For a succeeded “European pivot” toward Asia, the EU should demonstrate a bigger political and strategic unity – solidary amongst the member states. It will reinforce the fact that the EU is a credible partner for promoting and safeguarding the international law, international security and diplomacy. As a new step in this direction and contrary to her American counterpart, Federica Mogherini, the High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy in 2014-2019, delivered a speech which has been very well received by the audience at the Shangri La Dialogue.²²

“For a succeeded “European pivot” toward Asia, the EU should demonstrate a bigger political and strategic unity – solidary amongst the member states.”

China is Moving Fast in the Region, Especially in the Maritime Domain

China has a more aggressive approach in the maritime domain in the region, especially in the South China Sea’s maritime territorial disputes as mentioned below. In September 2013, China began the building of artificial islands in the Spratly islands and finished them in 2018. China justified these installations as being civilian infrastructure only, but satellite imagery reveals the presence of military facilities such as hangars, bunkers, missiles, and weapons systems. The primary goal of these artificial islands is to give Beijing the capacity to maintain a large-scale presence of naval, coastguard and militia ships on contradiction with the promotion of security and peace in

the region. Indeed, one favourite tactics from Chinese forces is to explicitly threaten the other coastal states, which are all ASEAN member states. For examples, Chinese coastguard ships intimidated civilian ships from the Spanish energy company Repsol from developing gas fields in the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of Vietnam but claimed by China.²³ In the Philippines, the authorities can’t renew their gas resources to produce electricity. The current offshore gas field, Malampaya, is decreasing and the country will face a critical energy shortage soon if it cannot exploit the large gas resources under the Reed Bank in the South China Sea. This area is also claimed by China and according to President Duterte of the Philippines, Chinese President Xi Jinping clearly threaten him that there would be “war” if Manila tried to exploit the gas resources.²⁴ In conclusion, on total contradiction with the EU foreign policy approach and EU values, Chinese actions and China’s strategy in the South China Sea are threatening the international rule of law but also the security (defence, social, energetic, political) of the coastal states which can bring a critical conflict in the region.

Finally, the diplomatic harvest could have come for the EU: it would be time to push further the initial efforts and to highlight the similar goals and practices to take advantage of the current situation, which has been set up by the American behaviour, the Chinese initia-

Interpreter, Lowy Institute, published on June 4, 2019, see: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/superpower-scrutiny-shangri-la>.

²² The Spanish Josep Borrell took over in July 2019.

²³ Bill Hayton, “How Europe can make a difference in the South China Sea”, Berlin Policy Journal, published on February 7, 2019, see: <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/how-europe-can-make-a-difference-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

²⁴ Manuel Mogato, “Duterte says China’s Xi threatened war if Philippines drills for oil”, Reuters, published on May 19, 2017, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-philippines-china/duterte-says-chinas-xi-threatened-war-if-philippines-drills-for-oil-idUSKCN18F1DJ>.

tives and the Southeast Asians reactions. Here are some possible avenues to scout.

New Paths to Explore

Capacity building, training, strategic dialogues: all these usual tools are part of the first-aid diplomatic kit, to send first signals and to put a foot in the chancelleries' doors. Having said that, let us see towards which specific fields the efforts should focus – in priority at sea.

EU and the Non-traditional Security in Southeast Asian Seas

Asia region is important for the European Union, both strategically and economically. Indeed, China is the second trading partner of the European Union and the ASEAN its third.²⁵ At the regional level, after a pause in 2009, the European Commission (in charge of negotiating treaties) and the ASEAN are discussing “the prospects towards the resumption of region-to-region negotiations”.²⁶ Consequently, stability in the region, especially in the maritime domain is required. The maritime sea lines of communications in Asia are important for the European Union and its member states alike. Many of their shipping companies sail through these waters. For example, Maersk and CMA-CGM are the first and third biggest shipping companies in the world; these Danish and the French seamen occupy strong positions respectively in Tanjung Pelepas (Malaysia) since 2000 and in Singapore since 2016.

“The maritime sea lines of communications in Asia are important for the European Union and its member states alike. Many of their shipping companies sail through these waters.”

To secure these sea-lanes of communications (SLOCs), the EU should share its knowledge in MDA/MSA (Maritime Domain Awareness/Maritime Situational Awareness). There is certainly something to learn – as bad or good experiences – from the common management of the sea borders along the Atlantic Ocean and the Mediterranean Sea. Would the Frontex (renamed European Border and Coast Guard Agency) pattern be replicable in Southeast Asia via the ASEAN, even at a different degree or level of cooperation? Can the Southeast Asian maritime agencies find any interests in the European Straits Initiatives or in the specialized agencies such as the European Maritime Safety Agency (together with the EU Satellite Centre) and the European Fisheries Control Agency (and its Coordination Centre)?²⁷ Besides the migrants, Brussels has to face the terror threat, like the littoral states of the SOMS (Straits of Malacca and Singapore) and of the Sulu-Sulawesi Seas, hence the EU-NAVFOR (Naval Force) Sophia for a better understanding of the maritime activities, set up in the Mediterranean Sea in 2015, and its cooperation with NATO (North Atlantic Treaty Organization), which has substituted its Active Endeavour mission by the Sea Guardian mission in 2016. At this stage, one could imagine (more) sharing sessions between the officers involved in these Mediterranean missions, the MSP (Malacca Straits Patrols) and the TMP

25 Alfred Gerstl, “The EU’s interest and policy towards East Asia maritime security”, Maritime Issues, published on October 26, 2018, see: <http://www.maritimeissues.com/politics/the-eu39s-interest-and-policy-towards-east-asia-maritime-security.html>.

26 Press release from the European Commission, “Fact sheet on EU-ASEAN relations”, last update on 7 May 2019, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/regions/asean/>.

27 The idea is to work on a Common Information Sharing Environment (in about 2020) and on an Integrated Maritime Surveillance, mainly based on a better interoperability across the European Enforcement Agencies.

(Trilateral Maritime Patrols) in the Sulu-Sulawesi (or Celebes) Seas. Regarding all these threats, both ASEAN and EU members opt for the same method, namely the “fusion” of the information: the IFC (Information Fusion Centre) in Singapore and the MSC-HOA (Maritime Security Centre – Horn of Africa) both in Brest (France) and Spain. Isn't it time now to share experiences in another domain: the feedback from the shipping community, to get a better picture of the maritime traffic (cf. the French “Voluntary Naval Control” or the French-British MDAT-GOG, Marine Domain Awareness for Trade – Gulf of Guinea, in Brest, France)? Furthermore, Denmark and Netherlands²⁸ are parts of the ReCAAP (Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery against Ships in Asia) in Singapore, while France is still knocking on its door. Last, the Chinese investments in Southern European ports, especially in Italy and Greece, question the other governments of the EU, as well as the Chinese infrastructures in Sumatra, in Mindanao or across the Malaysian peninsula puzzle the ASEAN community. How did each of them react? Are there any mistakes to avoid in the business models or the pre-agreements? This issue leads to switch to the more traditional threats and concerns, particularly in the so-called “East-Asian Mediterranean” Sea according to French historians²⁹ – another evidence or example of the geopolitical commonalities between the European and East-Asian sphere.

The European Union and the Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea

The European Union has clear interests in

²⁸ As well as Norway and the United Kingdom in Europe.

²⁹ See Fernand Braudel, Yves Lacoste, Denys Lombard and more recently François Gipouloux.

Southeast Asia and pursues a strategy based on the promotion of multilateral ocean governance and concrete collaboration measures. The European Union does not take part or does not have a stance on the territorial maritime disputes in the South China Sea between China and some ASEAN countries. Each of the countries argues that it is the legal owner of entire groups of reefs. China, Taiwan and Vietnam claim the Paracel and Spratly islands. The Philippines, Malaysia claim some reefs close to Borneo. Brunei claims one reef in the same area and Indonesia wants to reinforce its position on the Natuna islands.³⁰ The European Union authorities are concerned about some illegal actions and strategies pursued by some countries in the region, especially China, as previously mentioned. The European Union emphasizes multinational solutions, calls for the respect of international norms and the promotion of dialogue based on international law (here UNCLOS).³¹ Unlike the United States, both the European Union itself and its member states signed the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea. Unlike the United States too, the European Union lacks military capabilities of its own, even more, military power projection capabilities and rely on its member states when they are volunteered to project military forces in Southeast Asia, mostly France and the United Kingdom. It does not seem that the situation will evolve in the next years.

From a military and defence point of view, the European Union itself is lacking military

³⁰ Bill Hayton, “How Europe can make a difference in the South China Sea”, Berlin Policy Journal, published on February 7, 2019, see: <https://berlinpolicyjournal.com/how-europe-can-make-a-difference-in-the-south-china-sea/>.

³¹ Robin Emmott, “EU’s statement on South China Sea reflects divisions”, Reuters, published on July 15, 2016, see: <https://www.reuters.com/article/southchinasea-ruling-eu-idUSL8N1A130Y>.

capabilities. However, if the situation in the region should deteriorate, the European Union bodies may support its member states to send more warships to Asia and Southeast Asia. The European Union sent official observers on board of some French warships. The possibility to have a so-called “European task group” based on volunteer member states is not impossible. During the 2016 IISS Shangri-La Dialogue, former French Defence Minister and currently Foreign Affairs Minister Le Drian called for the increase of European countries warships presence and patrols in the region, especially in the South China Sea against the illegal activities - according to UNCLOS - from some countries.³² Senior EU diplomats in Singapore admitted that they had been “taken by surprise” when they heard him. Eventually, in April 2017, the French Defence Ministry invited a dozen of EU officers, beside an EU official, to cross the South China Sea, outside of the 12 nautical miles of the Spratleys Islands, on a Mistral-class ship – the Royal Navy personal and their two helicopters stayed until the end of the mission, in July 2017. In 2018, the speech of the new French Minister of the Armed forces, Mme Parly, was also and – surprisingly? – equally firm towards China – with a feeling of diplomatic-naval bids with her British counterpart. More recently, France sent its nuclear-propelled aircraft carrier for the last Shangri-La Dialogue; however, afterwards, this is a frigate, which sailed across the South China Sea, without any specific European crew.

At the end, a coalition with the support (probably mostly financially) of the European Union bodies could happen in the future. Their mis-

sion will not be a threat to any country, even China. On the contrary, the task force should make at least one port call in China during its mission to show the goodwill and that the European Union and its member states defend UNCLOS and the current international order. The task force’s goals should be to reaffirm the importance of Asia for EU’s strategic interests as previously mentioned through port calls in the region, training, exercises, conferences and exchanges of experience with Asian navies. Observers should be fair and point out that the European Union can impose sanctions in case of a consensus amongst EU member states on nations violating international law, like those against Russia after the illegal annexation of Crimea.

A last idea would be to reinforce military students exchanges with creating a European Union program allowing selected maritime law enforcement agents to take a training course in the European Union. The selection process could be done by the European Union delegations to ASEAN member states and it could follow the example of the program Erasmus Monde and Marie Curie.

Conclusion

After having wisely and patiently consolidating the basement of its strategy towards Asia in general and towards its geopolitical core in the ASEAN in particular, the EU has now the opportunity to take advantage of a new context. For that, it will take to deepening first initiatives and to find new paths towards close cooperation.

In parallel, it makes sense for Brussels to sustain bilateral partnerships, primarily in trade:

32 Tan Hui Yee, “France calls for European patrols in South China Sea”, *The Straits Times*, published on June 6, 2016, see: <https://www.straitstimes.com/asia/se-asia/france-calls-for-european-patrols-in-south-china-sea>.

for example, Singapore in October 2018, nine years after the first negotiations³³ and Vietnam in June 2019³⁴ have signed free trade and exchange agreements, while Indonesian trade negotiators have sat down with their EU counterparts in Jakarta for an eighth round of negotiations in June 2019 as well. All these various diplomatic beachheads will be useful in the short term.

Will it be enough to get an observer status within the ADMM-Plus (ASEAN Defence Ministerial Meetings – Expanded) or to deepen its partnership with ASEAN, as planned? The answer mainly lies within its state members. Indeed, their own national policies towards specific states, like China, regarding sensitive topics like arms exports or human rights, can a minima highlight a lack of consistence or harmonisation within the members. Much worse, it can also interfere with Brussels' Common Foreign and Security Policy. Last, let us see whether countries like France will play their own card or the European one get a seat within the ADMM-Plus first. The EU could lose key-players if Paris, after London – even if in a more frontal way – decided to choose the national option.

The recent appointments, in Singapore and within the European diplomats, in EU Delegations and at the European External Action Service (EEAS), will certainly give some clues. As a historian, Fernand Braudel did not want to be “terrorised by the events”. Nevertheless, political scientists have to be careful with the

global trends in the only *longue durée*: decisional processes, especially in diplomacy, still rely a lot on individuals.

33 Press release from the European Commission, “EU-Vietnam: trade agreement – investment protection agreement”, last update on 23 May 2019, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-singapore-agreement/>.

34 Press release from the European Commission, “EU-Singapore: free trade agreement – investment protection agreement”, last update on 25 February 2019, see: <http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/in-focus/eu-vietnam-agreement/>.



Reading time: 15 minutes*

Competitive Regional Security Architecture and the Value of ASEM

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Dr. Ren has conducted extensive research on maritime security and major countries relations in the Asia-Pacific region. In recent years, he has been paying special attention to China's neighbourhood diplomacy, with a particular focus on Southeast Asia and South Asia. He has been teaching and doing research on these aspects and has published books and articles on them.

Introduction

After the Cold War, security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region has undergone significant transformations. Especially in the context of “power-sharing” and “power-transfer” between China and the US, the Asia-Pacific security architecture is taking on a new appearance. Studies in the academic circle at home and abroad entered into a period of rapid development on security order and architecture in East Asia, Asia-Pacific and the now Indo-Pacific region.² In view of the gradually declining strategic mutual trust between major powers and the epidemic of nationalism in some countries, uncertainties in the development of the Asia-Pacific region are constantly on the increase. Against this background, many scholars in the United States turned to “offensive realism” as their canon with a pessimistic view about the prospects in the region. And some scholars even believed the growing tension and military competition between China and the United States in the region would make it difficult for both sides to get rid of the fate of “security dilemma” and thus make possible the outbreak of military conflict.³ As

perceived by many scholars, one of the major contributing factors of the state of “no-order” and even “disorder” in the Asia-Pacific security order is the imperfect regional security architecture.

As an important complementary to regional architectures, interregional mechanisms play an integral part to strengthen dialogue and cooperation among different regions and contribute to the improvement of global governance. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) with a low degree of institutionalisation between the EU member states and a large proportion of Asian countries, for more than a decade, provided an excellent opportunity for Asians and Europeans to cooperate in three main areas: the economy, politics, and sociocultural issues. Many observers believe ASEM has balanced power in the US-EU-East Asia triangle. In realistic terms, ASEM is the product of a balance of power between the United States and the EU in relation to East Asia.⁴ In the global context featuring major-power competition, deteriorating regional security situations and the entry into a new stage of development for the ASEAN community, it is critical to understand the current regional security architecture and explore the value of ASEM as an interregional mechanism.

Characteristics of the current Asia-Pacific Security Architecture Adjustment

Ever since the outset of the Cold War, the military alliance system, built with the Unit-

2 Representative achievements include: Claude A. Buss, ed., *National Security Interests in the Pacific Basin*, Hoover Institution Press, 1985; Ralph Cossa and Jane Khanna, “East Asia: Economic Interdependence and Regional Security,” *International Affairs*, Vol.73, No.2 (April 1997), pp. 219-234; Aeron L. Friendberg, “Ripe for Rivalry: Prospects for Peace in a Multi-polar Asia,” *International Security*, Vol.18, No.3 (1993/1994), pp. 5-33; Barry Buzan, “Security Architecture in Asia: the Interplay of Regional and Global Levels,” *The Pacific Review*, Vol.16, No.2 (June 2003), pp. 143-173. Chinese scholars have also carried out relevant research. Please see Su Hao, *From Dumbbell Structure to Olive Community: Cooperative Security in the Asia-Pacific Region*, Beijing: World Affairs Press, 2003; Liang Yunxiang, “The Current Situation and Conception of Asia-Pacific Security Architecture after the Cold War,” *The Journal of International Politics*, No.3 (2001), pp. 52-58; Ni Feng, “On the Political and Security Architecture in East Asia,” *The Chinese Journal of American Studies*, No.3 (2001), pp. 7-23; Liu Xuecheng, “Emerging Asia-Pacific Security Architecture and China’s Asian Diplomacy,” *The Journal of Contemporary Asia-Pacific Studies*, No.6 (2008), pp. 83-94.

3 Adam P. Liff and G. John Ikenberry, “Racing towards Tragedy? China’s Rise, Military Competition in the Asia-

Pacific and the Security Dilemma,” *International Security*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (Fall 2014), pp. 52-91.

4 Lluc López i Vidal, *The Theoretical Contribution of the Study Of Regionalism and Interregionalism in the ASEM Process, in Regionalism and Interregionalism in the ASEM context*, Number 23, Serie: Asia, CIDOB, December 2008, p.55.

ed States as its core, has been a key component of the Asia-Pacific security architecture, which can be considered as a multi-tiered “alliance-type” security architecture. The United States henceforth forged an array of bilateral and multilateral military alliances in Europe, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia and even in South Asia and the Middle East. In the Asia-Pacific region, the US-led alliance system is called the “hub-and-spokes system”, where the United States is positioned in the center of the hub while its allies are placed at the end of the spokes. This system features bilateral cooperation between the US and its allies without horizontal linkage between them. The rationale behind this system lies in the “threat-response” paradigm employed and favored by American scholars, that is, the alliance system is a rational response sparked by common threats.

After the end of the Cold War, this framework has become unsuited to the needs of American security interests in the Asia-Pacific region. Technically, the US chose to admit allied countries to the development and deployment of “Theater Missile Defense System” and thus get these allies connected with a network system. Meanwhile, the United States could directly round up its allies to engage in multilateral consultations on regional security issues and strive to make a mechanism out of such arrangements so as to forge a de facto multilateral alliance. After undergoing the shift of strategic focus and the “neglect” of the Asia-Pacific region when President George W. Bush held office, the Obama administration adamantly viewed strengthened ties with its allies as an indispensable “pillar” in the “returning to the Asia-Pacific” and the “Asia-Pacific rebalancing” strategies. Constructing a new regional security architecture is part and parcel of the Asia-Pacific “rebalancing” strate-

gy pursued by the Obama administration.⁵ It can be easily seen that the bilateral alliance system between the US and the Asia-Pacific region has taken on an obvious development trend into a comprehensive network. In this case, security cooperation between allied countries was institutionalized, horizontal links increased significantly, mini-lateral and multilateral cooperation was carried out between the US and its allies as well as between allied countries, thus making the single-track connection in the “hub-and-spokes” system into a crisscrossing and integrative network.⁶ This alliance network not only consolidated the well-established US-Japan, US-South Korea and US-Australia bilateral alliances but also constructed multiple triple-lateral cooperation frameworks involving the American alliance with Japan and South Korea, the American alliance with Japan and Australia, the American alliance with Japan and India, the American alliance with Japan and ASEAN as well as among “quasi-allies”. Some scholars call it as the “mini-lateralism” diplomacy pursued by the Obama administration.⁷

Since Donald Trump inaugurated in 2017, the U.S. unfolded new vision of regional security architecture. After Trump’s first trip to Asia in November 2017, the Indo-Pacific started to take shape as the geopolitical and concep-

5 Hillary Clinton, “Remarks on Regional Architecture in Asia: Principle and Priorities,” Imin Center-Jefferson Hall Honolulu, Hawaii, January 12, 2010, <http://www.state.gov/secretary/20092013clinton/rm/2010/01/135090.htm>.
“Hagel Describes Role of Partnerships in Asia-Pacific Rebalance,” April 2, 2014. <http://iipdigital.usembassy.gov/st/english/article/2014/04/20140402297291.html#axzz3xW4tjcQJ>.

6 Sun Ru, “The Asia-Pacific Alliance Network of the US and Its Prospects,” *International Studies*, No.4 (2012), p.39.

7 Zhang Yong, “A Brief Analysis on the Asia-Pacific ‘Mini-lateralism’ Diplomacy under the Obama Administration,” *The Chinese Journal of American Studies*, No.2 (2012), pp. 66-67.

tual background of US security and strategic involvement in Asia. The former “Asia-Pacific” became the “Indo-Pacific” for Washington’s defence and security policy planners.⁸ In the Trump era, quadrilateral cooperation, the so-called “Quad”, has been revived. Actually the so-called “Quad” originated in 2004 when militaries from Australia, India, Japan and the US engaged in joint humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HA/DR) operations after the Boxing Day Indian Ocean tsunami, but the turning point for the materialization of the Quad was 2006. In May 2006 senior officials from Australia, India, Japan and the United States arranged an inaugural Quad meeting on the sidelines of the ARF in Manila to discuss ways to take the four-power relationship forward. However, due to big and unbridgeable divergence of interest and domestic political changes, the Quad dissipate quickly. Much has changed since then. In November 2017, diplomats from Australia, India, Japan and US gathered for working-level consultations alongside the East Asia Summit(EAS) in Manila. The four governments held quadrilateral consultations in May and November 2018 on the margins of the Shangri-La Dialogue and EAS, respectively. As argued by some scholars, “The Quad is a symbolically and substantively important addition to an existing network of strategic and defense cooperation among four particularly capable democracies of the Indo-Pacific.”⁹

In the meantime, traditional land powers represented by China and Russia, after undergoing a succession of adjustment and coordination in the post-Cold War security relations, have gradually formed a “partnership-orient-

ed” security architecture totally different from the US-led alliance system. Moreover, both sides have constantly deepened their efforts in mechanism construction with substantial achievements. This has constituted a new picture of a promising Asia-Pacific security architecture. From a conceptual perspective, this collaboration-based security architecture differs greatly from the alliance-based security system advocated by the United States. Some scholars prefer to call the process of achieving regional order and peace according to the will and wishes of most countries as a “Chinese-style collaborative security model”. This model includes the concepts shared by the community, the practices of actors’ endeavor to preserve or promote the order objectives as well as the interaction to coordinate various actors within the basic mechanism framework of society.¹⁰ For all a touch of idealism, this model is geared to the actual needs of complicated security relations in the Asia-Pacific region.

Chinese government has also been attaching great importance to reforming regional security architecture in recent years. In March 2013, Chinese President Xi Jinping paid a state visit to Russia and the two countries issued the “China-Russia Joint Statement on Achieving Mutually Beneficial Cooperation and Comprehensively Deepening the Strategic Partnership of Coordination”, which clearly stated, “the top priority on the regional agenda is to build an open, transparent, even-handed and inclusive framework for security cooperation in accordance with the basic principles of the international law.” Both sides agreed to continue their joint work so as to adopt the

8 Geopolitics by other means: The Indo-Pacific reality, edited by Axel Berkofsky and Sergio Miracola, ISPI, February 2019.

9 Jeff Smith, “The Return of the Indo-Pacific Quad”, *The National Interest*, July 26, 2018.

10 Zhu Ning, “A Comparative Analysis on the Three Modes of East Asia Security Cooperation—Alliance Security, Cooperative Security and Collaborative Governance Security,” *World Economics and Politics*, No. 9 (2009), pp. 56-57.

“East Asia Summit Declaration of Principles on Strengthening the Asia-Pacific Regional Security Cooperation.”¹¹ Thereafter, at the 8th East Asia Summit held in October 2013, China and Russia formally proposed the establishment of the security cooperation framework in the Asia-Pacific region. Although the designing of the new Asia-Pacific regional security architecture was still in its infancy, this proposal put forward by China and Russia was of paramount strategic significance to the building of a new order in the Asia-Pacific region.¹²

On October 10, 2013, Chinese Premier Li Ke-qiang remarked at the 8th Session of the East Asia Summit held in Brunei — given multiple structures of economic cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region, it is imperative that the regional security architecture be established to meet the actual needs of different parties in line with their specific national conditions. This is the first time for the head of the Chinese government to put forward the initiative of building the security architecture in the Asia-Pacific. This move not only displays China’s strengthened capacity for agenda-setting but also manifests China’s aspirations to assume responsibilities for regional security with more active participation and endeavor. On January 11, 2017, Chinese government released a white paper on “China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific security cooperation”, which further demonstrates China’s security vision and policy in the region, and clearly elaborates the necessity and dimensions to improve the

regional security framework.¹³ Although the subject of building the regional security architecture has been mentioned by both parties, it is evident that China and the United States have diametrically different orientations and objectives to pursue.

In recent years, China’s “Belt and Road” initiative and Russia’s “Eurasian Union” strategy marked the tentative attempt and the early start with integration and adjustment of the “collaborative” security architecture under the new geo-strategic situation. The current intersection of these two strategies mainly focuses on the economic field with connectivity and cooperation between the “Silk Road Economic Belt” and the “Eurasian Economic Union” as the highlights. But against the background of Russia’s pushing forward “pivoting to the East” strategy in response to the US “returning to the Asia-Pacific” strategy as well as Russia’s willingness to cooperate with China in safeguarding maritime rights and interests, China and Russia will have greater potentials and prospects for cooperation under the framework of the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road. This strategic partnership is not just “convenient”.¹⁴ In this case, these strategic initiatives will serve as a new platform for both countries to develop a comprehensive strategic partnership of coordination and meanwhile mark the restructuring of geo-economy and geopolitics in the Asia-Pacific region and even the Eurasian continent at large by such emerging economies as China and Russia.¹⁵ Relevant security

11 “China-Russia Joint Statement on Achieving Mutually Beneficial Cooperation and Comprehensively Deepening the Strategic Partnership of Coordination,” Chinese Government Network, March 22, 2013 http://www.gov.cn/ldhd/2013-03/23/content_2360484.htm.

12 Liu Qingcai and Zhao Xuan, “Strategic Thinking of China-Russia’s Pushing Forward the Establishment of Asia-Pacific Security and Cooperation Architecture,” *Northeast Asia Forum*, No. 3 (2014), pp. 32-41.

13 China’s State Council Information Office, *China’s Policies on Asia-Pacific security cooperation*, January 11, 2017.

14 Michael Cox, “Not just ‘convenient’: China and the Russia’s new strategic partnership in the age of geopolitics,” *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics*, Vol 1, Number 4, 2016, pp.317-334.

15 Jacob Stokes, “China’s Road Rules: Beijing Looks West towards Eurasian Integration,” *Foreign Affairs*, April 19, 2015, <http://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/asia/2015-04-19/china’s-road-rules>.

concepts and system designing advanced by China on the basis of further economic integration, will win more support and popularity and thus give greater momentum to the continued adjustment of the Asia-Pacific security architecture.

The stability of the regional security architecture bears considerable relevance to the strengths of the core countries as well as their respective security strategies and policies. The current changes in the Asia-Pacific security architecture are largely attributed to the impact on the original regional power structure exerted by China's rapid rise. According to the classical theory of international relations, as the institutional supply is actually supported by power, so the changes in power structure will inevitably lead to the transformation of regional security architecture. What is going on in the China-US relationship, be it "power-transfer" or "power-sharing", is indicative of the changed power structure in the Asia-Pacific region. With the increasing escalation of strategic competition between China and the United States in the Asia-Pacific region, there is a growing and grave concern about the "new Cold War".¹⁶ The security relationship between "alliance-oriented" and "partnership-based" security architecture tends to be interpreted as the fate of the "established country" and the "rising power" as well as the structural contradictions between sea power countries and land power states. However, the Asia-Pacific region may also see smaller actors establishing and dominating the international system.¹⁷ ASEAN, through the construction of a series of multilateral security mechanisms,

has become the "third force" in the Asia-Pacific security architecture, thus providing a platform for dialogue for the two major power-led security architectures and meanwhile playing the role as one of the feasible paths to achieve an integrative Asia-Pacific security architecture in the near future.

The Changing Role of ASEAN in the Asia-Pacific Security Architecture

ASEAN countries have been playing a unique role in the multilateral security cooperation and the "weak mechanism" multilateral security cooperation system established around ASEAN has been serving as a bridge linking the "alliance-oriented" and "partnership-based" security architectures. Ever since its establishment in 1967, ASEAN, as an organization for Southeast Asian countries to jointly fight against communist expansion, has been entrusted with an important security mission. As the sole sub-regional international organization in the Asia-Pacific region during the Cold War, ASEAN has been committing itself to promoting cooperation among its member states as well as the peaceful settlement of disputes over some territory and territorial waters, such as the claims of the Philippines and Malaysia in Sabah. Externally, ASEAN has been trying to avoid sensitive and delicate issues concerning international politics and security, ensure that its member states can carry out effective cooperation in response to common threats and guarantee ASEAN's consistency, independence and flexibility in its external policies. This concept has prevailed till today. After the end of the Cold War, in the context of a rapidly changing strategic situation, Asian countries started to consider the importance of establishing a multilateral security mechanism. The Asia-Pacific security

16 Geoff Dyer, "US v China: is this the new cold war?" Financial Times, February 20, 2014.

17 Wei Ling, "Small Actors and International Institutions—CICA, ASEAN Regional Forum and Asian Security," World Economics and Politics, No.5 (2014), pp. 85-100.

cooperation began to take on a feature of “a distinctive combination of power-politics and institutional approach.”¹⁸ In order to maintain the proper balance of power within the region and ensure regional peace and stability, ASEAN actively explored the ways to establish a dialogue mechanism for regional multilateral security and endeavored to play a leading role.

For a long time, ASEAN has been playing a role as an advocate, communicator and even pace-setter in the Asia-Pacific security architecture. Although ASEAN has only occupied the position as a “driver” in a wide range of existing security architecture from “10+1”, “10+3” to the East Asia Summit, from the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) to ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM+), the role of ASEAN shall never be downplayed. However, Along with the elevation of ASEAN’s status came unprecedented challenges to ASEAN brought about by the big powers competition towards the future Asia-Pacific security architecture. Amitav Acharya from American University, has also expressed his apprehension about the tendency of ASEAN’s weakening role in the regional security architecture. He wrote specially to warn ASEAN that “While ASEAN faces significant challenges, these have less to do with its external environment, such as great power policies and interactions. Much more important are strains in ASEAN’s internal cohesion and capacity, especially owing to its expanded membership and agenda. ASEAN is not without precedent and advantages in dealing with great power politics. Its external environment is actually more helpful to its security role than is commonly portrayed by the pessimists. If ASEAN’s unity holds and it

makes necessary changes to its ambitions and agenda, it should not only survive great power competition, but continue to play a meaningful role in managing that competition, at least in Southeast Asia.”¹⁹

ASEAN’s position in the regional security architecture is being increasingly constrained by its own strategic orientation and the strategic adjustments by major powers. Now facing changes in the regional security configuration brought about by China’s rapid rise and the US Indo-Pacific strategy, countries in East Asia have adopted the “soft balancing” or “institutional balancing” strategy in succession to cope with the constantly changing situation.²⁰ On the one hand, the intensification of the US alliance network and the demonstration of Indo-Pacific strategy from US have played a “deconstruction” role in the “consistency” of ASEAN’s security policy. This has caused tremendous distress to ASEAN which has been attaching great value to “consensus after consultation” because a majority of non-US allies reject being “kidnapped” by the strategic interests rendered by the US alliance network. Donald Trump’s election victory casts doubt on America’s commitment to East and Southeast Asia, adding to long-standing concerns about US staying power. As some American think tanks suggested “the US can take numerous steps to avert disengagement from the region, especially from Southeast Asia.”²¹

18 Nick Bisley, *Building Asia’s Security*, Abingdon/New York: Routledge/International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2009, p. 19.

19 Amitav Acharya, “Doomed by Dialogue? Will ASEAN Survive Great Power Rivalry in Asia,” *The Asan Forum*, <http://www.theasanforum.org/doomed-by-dialogue-will-asean-survive-great-power-rivalry-in-asia/> “ASEAN can survive great-power rivalry in Asia,” October 4, East Asia Forum, 2015, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2015/10/04/asean-can-survive-great-power-rivalry-in-asia/>.

20 Derek McDougall, “Responses to ‘Rising China’ in the East Asian Region: Soft Balancing with Accommodation,” *Journal of Contemporary China*, Vol. 21, No. 73, January 2012.

21 Patrick M. Cronin and Anthony Cho, *Averting Disengagement: A Geoeconomic Strategy for the Trump Administration in Southeast Asia*, Center for a New American Security, 2017.

ASEAN's position in the regional security architecture is being increasingly constrained by its own strategic orientation and the strategic adjustments by major powers.

One the other hand, China has been attaching greater importance to the construction of an Asian security architecture with CICA as the firm basis, to the reshaping of security order in the Eurasian continent by employing the strategy of the "Belt and Road" initiative as well as the forging of "strategic countries of fulcrum" in its neighborhood security. All these moves have generated concerns about ASEAN's weakening position in the Asia-Pacific security architecture.

As a whole, the role of ASEAN is changing correspondingly in the current transition of the Asia-Pacific security architecture. This is not only a passive response to the changes in regional power structures but also a natural outcome when ASEAN's own concepts and practices choose to fit in well with a new strategic environment. At present, China and the United States have once again stood at the strategic "crossroad", but this time the strategic consensus established over the past 40 years has loosened with the likelihood of sliding into the "new Cold War". Under such circumstances, ASEAN's status in the regional security architecture is also facing new and significant changes.

As perceived by American strategist G. John Ikenberry, the Asia-Pacific region in the future needs to map out a more ambitious framework acceptable to both countries which can accommodate the US-led alliance system and multilateral security mechanism. In the meantime, the new region order will empow-

er China with greater authority and discourse power as well as satisfy middle powers in between China and the United States. Such a grand architecture is beyond the command of either China or the United States, because Japan, South Korea and ASEAN will decide "how deep we want the US involvement, how China should act the way we wish and how to find a system that allows China and the United States to engage in consecutively."²² A multi-tiered, crisscrossing "spaghetti bowl"-like regional security architecture will run parallel. Moreover, new and functional multilateral security mechanisms are bound to emerge along with the increasing importance of specific security issues such as maritime security. In this intricate security system, ASEAN's centrality will be continuously maintained and strengthened.

Against this backdrop, it is of paramount importance for China, the US and other major countries to "reassure" ASEAN's centrality in the regional security architecture. Xu Bu, the former Chinese ambassador to ASEAN, wrote in the Straits Times in 2015 to expound on the significance of maintaining ASEAN's centrality to East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region.²³ on the significance of maintaining ASEAN's centrality to East Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. The US government recently announced the invitation to ASEAN leaders to co-host the "US-ASEAN Summit" in February 2016 at a California resort. In the view of Nina Hachigian, the former US ambassador to ASEAN, this gesture reflected the "new normal" of President Obama's Asia-Pacific strategy.²⁴ Even in

22 G. John Ikenberry, "Liberal International Order should be Strengthened to Integrate Rising China," an interview by Yoichi Kato, Asahi Shimbun, September 13, 2013, <http://ajw.asahi.com/article/views/opinion/AJ201309130001>.

23 Xu Bu, "ASEAN Centrality Matters for East Asia Cooperation," The Strait Times, December 29, 2015.

24 Prashanth Parameswaran, "A 'Special' US-ASEAN Summit in

the grand Indo-Pacific strategy, “the states of ASEAN are pivotal to any debate about the future of the Indo-Pacific. Geographically, diplomatically and strategically, ASEAN sits at the heart of this important region.”²⁵ At the 34th ASEAN summit which was held in Bangkok on June 23 2019, member-states disclosed its outlook for the Indo-Pacific, officially termed the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). It emphasizes the importance of the maritime domain in the regional architecture and ASEAN’s centrality.²⁶ In recent years, ASEAN’s centrality also clearly reflects in the interregional cooperation between Europe and Asia. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is a novel example to articulate ASEAN’s role and contribute to the evolving regional architectures.

The Rising Importance of ASEM and China’s Position

Since its establishment in 1996, ASEM has been playing an important role as a highly influential interregional cooperation mechanism in the Asia-Pacific region. It conforms to the situation of economic globalization and regional integration and has an increasingly important role in the establishment of new-type partnerships on two continents, the development of civilized dialogue, the enhancement of mutual understanding, and the promotion of economic and trade cooperation. It can be said that the establishment of a new equal Asia-Europe partnership marked by the Asia-Europe Meeting after the end of the Cold War is not an accident, but the result

of the synergy of various international factors.

Firstly, with the transformation of the world pattern, the peace and development era has provided a favorable international environment for the Asia-Europe relations. Secondly, the world economy is mainly consistent of three pillars— Western Europe, North America and East Asia. There is an urgent need for an Asia-Europe cooperation mechanism to connect East Asia and Western Europe. Thirdly, the sustained and rapid development of East Asia’s economy has narrowed the economic gap. The mutual complements in economy between East Asia and Western Europe has been enhancing. The huge market of East Asia and the capital and technology of Western Europe have promoted profound interdependence and cooperation between them. Finally, changes in cultural concepts have laid a cultural foundation for the accelerated development of Asia-European cooperation.²⁷ It is due to the benign international environment and needs of both sides that have contributed to the development of the new equal partnership between Asia and Europe which consists of equality, mutual benefit and cooperation and started the ASEM cooperation process towards the 21st century.

The world is moving towards a historical juncture. On the one hand, with the rising status of the east and the declining of the west in the international pattern and the further development of the world multi-polarization, the global governance system and international order are changing towards a more just and rational direction. On the other hand, the world economy lacks growth momentum and the economic globalization has suffered setbacks and the

Sunnylands in 2016?” *The Diplomat*, December 25, 2015.

25 Julia Bishop, “ASEAN: The nexus of the Indo Pacific”, Asia Society Speech, New York, March 8, 2018. Available at: https://foreignminister.gov.au/speeches/Pages/2018/jb_sp_180308.aspx?w=tb1CaGpkPX%2FIS0K%2Bg9ZKEg%3D%3D

26 Prashanth Parameswaran, Assessing ASEAN’s New Indo-Pacific Outlook, *the Diplomat*, June 24, 2019.

27 Yu Jianhua, Evaluation of the development of ASEM mechanism in the new century, *Journal of International Relations*, Number 4, 2016.



ASEM member states represent 65% of the global economy and 55% of the global trade, which means that they depend on a liberal and rules-based global world order.

polarization between rich and poor has become increasingly serious. The wind of trade protectionism is blowing and the downside risks are increasing with more uncertainties and instability factors. The regional hotspots are on the rise and non-traditional threats to security are still grim. Therefore, under the current international situation, the Asia-Europe cooperation has a more far-reaching significance.

Compared with other regional cooperation mechanisms, ASEM is a typical representative of interregionalism.²⁸ Globalization and regional integration are important reasons for the development of interregionalism. And this development will affect the structure of the

international system and the construction of identity within the region. Under the current complex and changing international environment and the competition among major powers, the importance of ASEM appears gradually. ASEM formed at the end of the Cold War and the rise of economic globalization. The multilateralism and the open world economy are the foundations and the always popular themes of this meeting. In this era, ASEM can respond well to unilateralism and protectionism and resolutely safeguard the international order of multilateralism and also respect the central position of the UN and its Security Council in global governance. Faced with complex and serious development problems and non-traditional security issues, Asian and European countries need to strengthen unity and coordinate actions on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and issues such

²⁸ Hainer Hanggi, Ralf Roloff & Jurgen Ruland, eds, *Interregionalism and International Relations*, London: Routledge, 2006.

as climate change. In terms of global economic governance, Asia and Europe should always hold high the standard of the open world economy and safeguard a fair and non-discriminatory multilateral trading system to promote the establishment of an open and inclusive regional free trade arrangement and an open world economy and accelerate the construction of a unified market in Asia and Europe, opposing various forms of protection. These are important prerequisites for sustainable growth in Asia and Europe. In addition, ASEM's promotion of interoperability and interactions and mutual learning is very essential for the economic development and social progress of European and Asian countries. Facing new challenges and new opportunities, it is high time to deepen cooperation between Asia and Europe.²⁹

China is always the firm supporter of ASEM. Its position and policy on Asia-Europe cooperation has not changed. From 1996, China has played a significant role in the ASEM process. China has not only actively supported ASEM activities but has also added significant weight to the Asian side of ASEM. Indeed, one of the primary objectives in forming ASEM was the deepening of Chinese engagement with the international system.³⁰ For China, ASEM's principle of equal partnership with Europe in the areas of the economy, politics and culture has been highly appreciated.³¹ China is also a staunch supporter of interregionalism and multilateralism. ASEM's trans-regional coop-

eration model has offered a new impetus to globalization and will contribute to political mutual trust, economic cooperation, cultural and educational exchanges and mutual learning between Asian and European countries and promote the development of multilateralism and multi-polarization. Determinacy and positive energy are provided for the current uncertain international situation. In the context of China-U.S. intensified strategic competition, China's support to the ASEM does not mean to exclude the U.S. out of the region and establish a new political and economic world order that is only profitable to China. China refers to use this platform to promote economic cooperation between Asia and Europe and meet together the challenges brought about by the uncertainty of world development. Over the years, China has also seen the platform as vital to promote economic cooperation. What can facilitate this vision is the Chinese BRI initiative. This initiative conforms to the trend of globalization, the global governance system reform demand of the times, and the aspirations of people of all countries to live a better life. At the second Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized that China will not implement this initiative alone. He repeatedly mentioned the word "cooperation" and invited foreign and private sector partners to participate more and also called for more multilateral and commercial financing for the BRI infrastructure projects. It will lay the foundation for future cooperation among big countries such as China, the United States and Europe. BRI has become an important platform for the in-depth cooperation between Asia and Europe and will also ease strategic competition among major countries to some extent. Next year, the 13th ASEM will be held in Cambodia. The meeting will be very crucial in the background of the dramatic changes in the

29 Zhang Jun, "New challenges, new opportunities to deepen cooperation between Asia and Europe", *People's Daily*, Oct. 11, 2018.

30 Bart Gaenes, Gauri Khandekar eds, *Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)*, Palgrave macmillan, 2017, pp.220-221.

31 Louis Brennan and Philomena Murray eds, *Drivers of Integration and Regionalism in Europe and Asia: comparative perspectives*, London: Routledge, 2015, pp.315-316.

international situation and relations between major powers. Its importance is obvious. It will help Asian and European countries strengthen their new partnerships, promote deeper and more substantive cooperation between Asia and Europe and enhance the stability of the world peace and development with the certainty of Asia-Europe cooperation and the consistency of multilateralism maintenance.

“ASEM’s trans-regional cooperation model has offered a new impetus to globalization and will contribute to political mutual trust, economic cooperation, cultural and educational exchanges and mutual learning between Asian and European countries and promote the development of multilateralism and multi-polarization.”

As Cambodia Foreign Minister Prak Sokhonn said “It is an important forum to promote cooperation between the two continents and will provide many opportunities that benefit Cambodia”. China has expressed staunch support for Cambodia in hosting the next ASEM summit, and believe it will definitely be a great success, contribute to the interregional architecture building and open a new era for Asia-Europe cooperation.

