



UNIVERSITY OF LEEDS

**The ASEAN-EU Relations:
Assessing Europe's Ability of Successful Policy Making**

**MA South East Asian Studies
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Disclaimer:

The author refers with the term European Union (EU) to both, the European Community and the European Union, as the later one is the successor of the first.

1. Introduction

Researching in the field of ASEAN-EU relations, you will always encounter the concept of inter-regionalism. Interregionalism is the idea of interaction between two groups which one party presenting more or beyond a single nation state. Clear classifications vary, but it comes down to the concept of bilateral inter-regionalism, an encounter of two regional organisations (e.g. EU-ASEAN, EU-MERCOSUR). Or the concept of trans-regional arrangements, as Tsardanidis call them (2010, p. 129), a more heterogeneous and diffuse grouping of states, most often this incorporates countries from two more or less loose defined regions and their regional organisations. A good example therefore would be the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), including the EU-27 states, the European Commission, countries of Asia and Oceania and the ASEAN Secretariat.

Inter-regionalism is broadly discussed in academic literature. Rüländ (2001) and Hwee (2007) deliver a good explanation on how to apply international relations theory: For realists' interregionalism is a tool to gain relative power in contrast to their competitors, thereby states would only participate if it is for their gain (Rüländ, 2001, p. 6) furthermore it is "a reaction to increased regionalism and the fear of 'fortress region'" (Hwee, 2007, p. 176) and would have a balancing function. Institutionalists describe interregionalism as an instrument to avoid conflicts and manage complex structures of a globalised world, with international organisations having a primary role in this process (Hwee, 2007, p. 175; Rüländ, 2001, p. 7). The core for social constructivists is the ability to build identities through intraregional cooperation (Hwee, 2007, p. 176; Rüländ, 2001, p. 8). Referring to Söderbaum et al. (2005, p. 368ff) interregionalism is a core element of the EU foreign policy, whereby they mention three aims: (i) the promotion of liberal internationalism, (ii) building the EU's identity as a global actor, and finally (iii) the promotion of the EU's power and competitiveness.

With the EU as a vital actor in the field of interregionalism the following analysis its relationship with the ASEAN, thereby I will focus on the achievements at the end of the last decade. The above will build the foundation to evaluate if the EU is capable of fulfilling its set targets. Therefore this essay will look at the history of both entities and their cooperation, in a second step I will take a look at the EU policy guidelines towards ASEAN and the Nuremberg Declaration. Based on the aforementioned, I will try to evaluate if the EU is capable of fulfilling its set targets in the EU-ASEAN relationship.

2. The History of the EU-ASEAN Relations

2.1. ASEAN & EU

The history of both organisations goes back to the post World War II decades. ASEAN was founded in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand and describes itself as the

“most successful inter-governmental organization in the developing world” (ASEAN Secretariat, 2011). The EU dates back to 1957 when five European countries namely, Belgium, France, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Germany (EU, 2011) signed the Treaty of Rome. Nowadays, the EU presents the highest integrated regional organisation in the world. It has 27 members, a single market, a common currency (for the majority of member states) and free movement of people. However membership in ASEAN began to increase in the consecutive years following 1967 with the joining of Brunei (1984), Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997) Myanmar (1997) and Cambodia (1999). However, the institutional development was not straight forward same as commitment and in-depth integration was limited for several decades. Nonetheless the association introduced a new charter in 2008 and with it a “major step forward in the process of establishing a human rights body for ASEAN” (Phan, 2008, p. 12) took place. Furthermore the association agreed to establish the ASEAN Community by 2015 (Dosch, 2011, p. 202).

2.2. Three Phases of Relationship

The common history of both organisations started in 1972 with the foundation of the ‘Special Co-Ordination Committee’ (Dosch, 2011, p. 222). From then on, the EU became the first ‘Dialogue Partner’ of ASEAN. According to Rüländ (2001, p. 9) the rapprochement was driven by ASEAN. A major step was the ASEAN-EC Cooperation Agreement signed in Kuala Lumpur in 1980. The 1980 agreement is until this day the foundation of the EU-ASEAN cooperation, and was extend to all new member countries of the ASEAN except Myanmar (Dosch, 2011, p. 223; de Flers, 2010, p. 3).

At this point it is important to mention that the EU-ASEAN relations should be evaluated according to their three different phases: Prior to the 1990s, the ASEAN was not the first priority partner of the EU in the developing world (Hwee, 2007, p. 178; Rüländ, 2001, p. 18). Even as the EU focused on economic cooperation (Rüländ, 2001, p. 18), it is to admit, that their ties were limited and the relationship was much more expressed in a donor recipient relation (de Flers, 2010, p. 3; Rüländ, 2001, p. 11). Nevertheless both partners appeared successfully together on the international stage, namely the UN General Assembly (Rüländ, 2001, p. 12). Generally speaking, the EU-ASEAN relation is not appraised as the most gleaming one up until the 1990s (Hwee, 2007, p. 178; Rüländ, 2001, p. 13ff), even so the institution building was quite successful.

This period was followed by a decade of disagreements throughout the 1990s, as the EU put more critical topics on the agenda (e.g. human rights, good governance and democracy); the advancement of the 1980 Cooperation Agreements was put on hold (de Flers, 2010, p. 4). Outstanding was only the 11th AEMM (ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting) in Karlsruhe, with the so-called “Spirit of Karlsruhe” (Rüländ, 2001, p. 19), but with the accession of Myanmar to the ASEAN new frictions between both

partners arose. As a result Myanmar is the only ASEAN country that has not joined the Cooperation Agreement (Dosch, 2011, p. 223).

The third phase was entered in the 2000s, starting off with the 2001 Communication on “Europe and Asia, a Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships” (EU, 2001) and followed by a strategic document issued by the EU in 2003 “A new Partnership with Southeast Asia” (EU, 2003). Finally, both partners announced the so-called “Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership” in 2007 (EU2007.de, 2007).

3. The EU Agenda for the ASEAN

The following will give a short summary of the strategic document of 2003 and then look at the Nuremberg Declaration. Finally this essay will assess if the EU is capable of realising its foreign policy in Southeast Asia.

The main duty of “A new Partnership with Southeast Asia” is to strengthen the relationship between both regions. This is mainly driven by the rising economic importance of the Asia Pacific and the reduction of poverty and goes along with the aim to raise the quality of life in the region. Priorities outlined by the EU include: regional stability and the fight against terrorism; the promotion of human rights; democratic principles and good governance. The importance of the “fundamental human rights and democratic principles, as laid down in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights” is emphasized as an “essential element of agreement” (EU, 2003, p. 15). Further priorities include issues under the umbrella of organised crime, migration and trade. In trade related issues, the Commission proposed a so-called action plan, the Trans-Regional EU-ASEAN Trade Initiative (TREATI), which is aiming towards a free trade agreement among both regions. Further priorities outlined are poverty reduction, broader and deeper dialogue as well as cooperation on manifold fields. The Commission recognises the need for stronger intra-regional ties, but also mentions the limitations to further developing the Cooperation Agreement due to the EU’s position on Myanmar.

The Nuremberg Declaration builds upon the above mentioned strategy and is a joint declaration of both regional organisations, adopted on March 15, 2007 (EU2007.de, 2007). Besides the general appraisal of the achievements till present, both parties have also committed to “enhance EU-ASEAN dialogue and cooperation” and also to cooperate on the level of institutional building and with the aim to learn from each other. The intra-regional cooperation is then summarized into five different fields: political and security cooperation, economic cooperation, cooperation on the field of energy security and climate change/environment, socio-cultural cooperation and development cooperation. Most of the Nuremberg Declaration could be found in “A new Partnership with Southeast Asia”, a large emphasis is given to the cooperation in trade related issues, but in regard of human rights, the

Nurmburg Declaration only mentions them in the introductory paragraphs. Dosch (Dosch, 2011, p. 244) mentions the long list of liberal values stated in the declaration, but a follow up on his reference to the Plan of Action (PoA) (ASEAN, 2007) reveals that ASEANs willingness of admission on this field is limited. In the following section, the EU policy will be assessed based on international relations theory.

4. Assessing the EU Foreign Policy

4.1. Neo-Realists

In light of the neo-realist perspective, both documents raise two core matters, which are central to the neo-realist idea of power: security and trade related issues. As many authors including Dosch (Dosch, 2011, p. 233) have mentioned, Europe has no hard power interest in the region. Nevertheless, the Southeast Asian countries see the EU as an important partner to avoid international conflicts, fight terrorism and face international crime. Economically Europe has already got a foot on the ground in Asia as the EU is the second largest trading partner for most ASEAN countries (Dosch, 2011, p. 231). However, besides the goal to sign a Free Trade Agreement (FTA), the EU would like to strengthen its position in other trade and investment fields so as not to lose out against its competitors. Both documents give a hint towards this direction, but as for the FTA negotiations, they were put on hold in May 2009, and the EU prefers bilateral agreements nowadays (Camroux, 2010, p. 68f).

4.2. Institutionalists

From an institutional perspective, the literature broadly tells us that the EU and ASEAN are developing together towards a “multilayered system of global governance” (Hwee, 2007, p. 176). The EU is aware of its limitations and constraints in light of a special relationship, and therefore “proposes to revitalise ties with Southeast Asia”. The institutions already in place are crucial to this process. The Nuremberg Declaration even widens the scope and adds a whole list of institutions, cooperation’s, treaties and platforms, to foster global, intra-regional, multi-lateral and regional dialogues and collaborations.

4.3. Constructivists

Applying the constructivist framework reveals that each document puts things slightly differently. One of the core elements of “A new Partnership with South East Asia” is the “promoting of human rights, democratic principles and good governance” (EU, 2003, p. 14ff), along with the aim to enhance dialogue and cooperation on several fields. In reference to the Charta of Fundamental Right of the European Union, and the idea of “promotion of liberal internationalism” (Söderbaum et al.,

2005, p. 368) it is to admit that the Nuremberg Declaration has some shortcomings. At this point it is to mention, that recent developments in regards to Human Rights was achieved especially through the EU diplomacy. Even if the words chosen in the Nuremberg Declaration are scarce, the long-standing discussion within the ASEAN about Myanmar and calls on the level of the ASEM contributed to successful lobbying (Dosch, 2011, p. 235). Besides that, the Nuremberg Declaration picks up matters where the EU actively contributes with its skills, concept and ideas, and thereby it serves to convey a European way. Examples therefore are, the “Cooperation in the field of Energy Security and Climate Change/Environment” or the support of ASEAN Community building (EU2007.de, 2007), with the EU as a major donor to enhance the later one (Dosch, 2011, p. 277).

5. Summary

Söderbaum et al. (2005) provide a good tool to assess the EU foreign policy. Going through them one can see that foreign policy always experiences limitations when put into practice. A good example is the promotion of liberal ideas, where different channels of communication are needed to promote them successfully. But not only has this case revealed the limitations of day to day politics, if we consider the long standing partnership between both entities it is astonishing how little has been achieved to deepen the economic relations and to sign a FTA . Finally, the analysis reveals that the success of the EU is ambiguous, from a neo-realist perspective most observers would describe the relations as ‘talking shop’, on paper both parties commit to common goals, but putting them into practice in favour of the EU is one of the big challenges. An institutionalist would judge the EU agenda as quite successful, even so the depth of the institutional links could be questioned, but nevertheless literature reveals that there are various links amongst both parties which enhance the international dialogue. From a constructivist angle the EU is limited to promote Human Rights in the Nuremberg Declaration, however one of the big success stories is the promotion of the European idea of regional integration among Southeast Asian countries. Finally it is to say, the EU is capable of communicating and agreeing with its partners on common goals. Nevertheless, to judge if the foreign policy is successful based on the goals described by Söderbaum et al. (2005) needs to be discussed separately.

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