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ASEAN and the European Union: A Bumpy Inter- regional Relationship

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1. Introduction

Although diehard realists still view the nation state as the main actor in an anarchical international environment, its dominant role has come under siege. Analysts inspired by neoliberal and institutionalist thinking hold against realists that globalization has shaped an international system in which interdependence and cooperation have fostered the rise of new influential actors such as inter- and transnational organizations. It is thus no accident that there is a rapidly growing literature which treats international institutions both as a dependent as well as an independent variable of state behavior. Regional organizations, proliferating in the past two decades, have been a particular focus of this research. While there exists now considerable knowledge on the genesis, evolution, efficiency and legitimacy of such regional organizations and, *vice versa*, their impact on the behavior of nation states, scholars have neglected the fact that regional organizations are developing their own external relations and becoming actors in their own right (Cremona 1998; Ginsberg 1999). While the European Union (EU) is spearheading these developments, other regional organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Mercosur, the Andean Community, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), to name only a few, are busily developing their own interregional networks.

Dating back to the early 1970s, ASEAN-EU relations have been spearheading this novel trend. As the perhaps most advanced interregional relationship, thirty years of ASEAN-EU cooperation provide a rich empirical base for evaluating the achievements of these ties. For this purpose an analytical framework highlighting five major functions of interregionalism will be developed in the next section. Viewed from different theoretical angles, it attaches to interregionalism balancing, institution-building, rationalizing, agenda-setting and identity-building functions.

While the extent to which these functions can be identified in the ASEAN-EU relationship provides us with more systematic insights into the latter's substance, our analytical framework transcends ASEAN-EU relations. It permits us to offer some still tentative answers to the theoretically more challenging issue in what way interregional fora contribute to an emergent structure of global governance. Are they forming nodal points of international relations, thereby facilitating a division of labor among international institutions? Or are they part of what Reinecke calls a „loose set of cross-national policy patchworks, conspicuous for their missing links and unnecessary overlaps“ (Reinecke 1998:10)? Although a case study like the one presented here is hardly able to provide exhaustive answers to such far-reaching questions, they will nevertheless be reconsidered in the concluding section of this paper. The preceding two sections, discussing the empirical material, subdivide ASEAN-EU relations into two major periods: the first covering the period until the end of the Cold War (1972-1990), the second focussing on the postbipolar era (1990-2001).

2. *Interregionalism: A New Level of Interaction in International Relations*

The literature on regionalism distinguishes two waves of regionalization. A first wave in the 1950s and 1960s was basically inspired by the early successes of European integration and the growing popularity of *dependencia* theories with their emphasis on collective self-reliance in much of the Third World. They gave rise to the formation of regional organizations particularly in Latin America and to a lesser extent in Asia, Africa and the Arab

world. A second wave of regionalism, known as the *New Regionalism*, can be observed from the mid-1980s onward and is usually closely linked to the unfolding forces of economic liberalization and globalization. Nation states, especially weaker and smaller ones, are thereby perceived as responding to the challenges of globalization by pooling resources and bargaining power.

The *New Regionalism* has spurred a vertical differentiation of international relations which increasingly develop into a multi-tiered system ranging from the global multilateral level to the conventional bilateral ties between nation states (Rüland 1996a, 1999a, 2000). The proliferation of regional actors created a need for intermediaries linking global and regional institutions and – at the lower end of the international system – regional and national policy-making levels. As a result interregional fora and subregional transborder institutions¹ emerged. While for the purpose of our study we may neglect the subregional level, it is important to note here that the upper end of the international system bifurcated into two types of interregionalism: First, an older bilateral interregionalism or bi-regionalism which can be traced back to the 1970s and, second, nascent forms of transregionalism emerging in the 1990s (Aggarwal/Morrison 1998; Rüland 1999b).² ASEAN-EU relations have been thriving under both forms of interregionalism.

Bilateral interregionalism such as the ASEAN-EU relationship can be defined as group-to-group dialogues with more or less regular meetings centering around exchanges of information and cooperation (projects) in specific policy fields (trade and investment, environment, crime prevention, narcotics trafficking etc.). It is based on a low level of institutionalization, usually at the ministerial, ambassadorial and senior officials' levels, sometimes supplemented by permanent or *ad hoc* experts' working groups.

- 1 Such as the Euroregions, the Southeast Asian growth triangles and quadrangles or the transborder regions between the United States and Canada and Mexico.
- 2 For the distinction see Rüland, Jürgen (1999b): *Transregional Relations: The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) – A Functional Analysis*, Paper prepared for the International Conference on „Asia and Europe on the Eve of the 21st Century“, 19-20 August 1999 in Bangkok at Chulalongkorn University.

There are no common overarching institutions, both sides exclusively rely on their own institutional infrastructure.

Transregional institutions such as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) or the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) have a more diffuse membership which does not necessarily coincide with regional organizations and may include member states from more than two regions. New members of regional organizations represented in a transregional forum will not be automatically allowed to enter the respective forum. As the agenda grows in complexity, transregional fora may, unlike bilateral interregional relations, develop their own organizational infrastructure such as a secretariat for research, policy planning, preparation and coordination of meetings and implementation of decisions. Such processes of institutional evolution vest transregional fora with some form of independent actorness and distinguish them from bilateral interregionalism.

Theories of international relations attach varying priority to international cooperation in general and regional cooperation in particular. Realists, for instance, do not value cooperation as a constituting norm of international relations. For them international organizations are merely another arena where nation states contest for power. States thus cooperate only as long as this enhances their power. Under such circumstances cooperation is overshadowed by persistent fears that the gains are distributed unequally and thus may lead to relative losses of power. Viewed from such a perspective cooperation can hardly be more than a short-term phenomenon.

Even if globalization has reduced the efficiency of military capacities and power is now primarily determined economically, realists tend to view interregional relations chiefly in categories of power. Exemplary for this thinking is the representation even of economic competition in militaristic terminology such as „economic wars“ and „economic encircling“. In this context, inter- and transregional fora are viewed as a device of the Triad players for maintaining an equilibrium among themselves and of peripheral regions for adjusting to the dynamics of the Triad. Accordingly, inter- and transregional fora may be regarded as a coalition or alliance of regional players directed against others which are activated when need arises.

Unlike realists liberal institutionalists regard cooperation as a key to mitigate the anarchical character of international relations, to minimize the incidence of violent conflict and to enhance the welfare of peoples. Cooperation intensifies the flow of information between actors, builds trust and enhances the predictability of state behavior. By creating norms and rules designed to guide state actions, cooperation has a legalizing effect on international relations. *Institution-building* is thus considered an important prerequisite for peaceful dispute settlement.

Viewed from this angle, inter- and transregional fora add another institutional layer to the international system and thus enhance the latter's institutional density. Facilitating this is the growth of subsidiary institutions such as summits, ministerial rounds, senior officials' meetings, track two processes, expert working groups and NGO fora. Furthermore, inter- and transregional fora create an increasing demand for internal coordination as members of regional organizations are well advised to formulate common positions prior to summits and ministerial meetings. It is not farfetched to assume that spillovers of better coordination are qualitative increases of intraregional cooperation. Finally, if inter- and transregional dialogues also engage great powers, they may contain their hegemonial ambitions and socialize them into cooperative multilateralism.

Similarly important, inter- and transregional fora may be perceived as *rationalizers* of multilateral global fora. This refers to the fact that the latter have to contend with an increasingly complex and technical nature of policy matters and a growing number of actors, often representing extremely diverse interests. Consequently, multilateral negotiations at the global level nowadays proceed with a snail's pace. Trade liberalization provides a good example. While early GATT rounds wound up within less than a year, the Kennedy Round (1964-1967) lasted three years, the Tokyo Round (1973-1979) six years and the Uruguay Round (1986-1994) nearly eight years.³

Such agonizingly slow decision-making and the concomitant bazaar-style bargaining not only weaken the efficiency of global fora but, as a corollary,

3 The documents WTO agreement cover 22,000 pages, not including fifteen subsidiary agreements (Kevavapany 1996:23).

also their legitimacy. Viewed against this background, regional, inter- and transregional fora may divide negotiations on global issues into a staggered bottom-up process which may start at the regional level before being elevated to the inter- or transregional level and finally to the global level. On the aggregate such a step-by-step process may save time, as consensus-building in several numerically smaller fora is likely to be more efficient than in one unwieldy global body. Inter- and transregional dialogues thus streamline the overburdened agenda of global organizations, keep in check the ensuing bottlenecks at the top level of the international system and thus prevent a suffocation of global institutions.

Inter- and transregional fora may also exert *agenda-setting* (or *agenda-controlling*) functions. They provide convenient platforms for building broad-based coalitions that may strongly lobby in favor of (or against) a certain issue in global institutions. Especially large players, which acting alone would encounter a lot of opposition in global institutions, and therefore would most likely resort to unilateral action, may use inter- and transregional fora in such a way. But also middle powers may skilfully instrumentalize inter- and transregional dialogues for advancing policies that otherwise would encounter little support in global institutions.

Finally, constructivists view international cooperation from a cognitive perspective. Cooperation is thus the result of previous experiences and interactions. The way other regional organizations cooperate may thus have repercussions on the own type of regionalism. Constructivists therefore argue that inter- and transregional dialogues are spurring collective identities. Especially in heterogeneous and newly formed regional groupings interregionalism may stimulate regional *identity-building*. It may sharpen differences between self and other and thus help galvanize regional solidarity on the basis of shared norms.

Fostering „regionalism through interregionalism“ (Gilson 1998; Hänggi 1999) may be intended or unintended. It is intentional, if one group offers material incentives to the other for strengthening regional cohesion. In the case of the EU, which is deliberately pursuing the role of an „external federator“, such a policy has a rationalizing effect on its own external relations

because it enables Brussels to negotiate policy frameworks with entire groups of countries where previously it had to deal with them individually. In cases of highly asymmetrical relationships inter- and transregionalism may however also generate unintended collective identity-building. This may be the case, if the relationship is perceived by one side as a device in the hands of the other to establish or consolidate superiority. Such perceptions, which tend to denounce the behavior of the superior organization in terms of paternalism or even neocolonialism, inevitably produce backlashes by encouraging the weaker organization to develop its own set of collective symbols and mythology in explicit opposition to the other side. The drawback, however, is that the ensuing relationship may be characterized by intensifying conflict and therefore may – if not contained – minimize the gains of cooperation and in the end even jeopardize the entire relationship.

3. *ASEAN-EU Relations 1972-1990: Asymmetrical Indifference?*

The first initiative for developing ASEAN-EU relations came from ASEAN. It was basically a response to economic changes in Europe and shifts in the Asian power equation. With the British accession to the EC imminent in the early 1970s, former British colonies Malaysia and Singapore were concerned losing their comparatively liberal Commonwealth trade preferences (Snitwongse 1989; Gerlach 1993; Dreis-Lampen 1998; Bridges 1999; Yeung/Perdikis/Kerr 1999). The anticipated loss of a major European market and the trade barriers imposed by the European common market project became a strong rationale for a more systematic policy approach towards Brussels. This widely shared belief among ASEAN decision-makers was exacerbated by European tendencies to respond to the collapse of the Bretton Woods monetary system and the two oil crises of the 1970s with increased protectionism (Armbrosius 1996). However, overtures towards Europe were also motivated by a desire to balance the traditionally strong American economic presence in the region and a more recent aggressive Japanese trade offensive which revived memories of Japan's war-time *Greater East Asian Co-Prosperty Sphere* (Lukas

1989:104). Strong anti-Japanese sentiments in the region surfaced with the „*Buy Thai*“ campaign launched by the Thai student movement (Morrill/Samudavanija 1981; Girling 1981; Prizzia 1985) and the riots accompanying Japanese Prime Minister Tanaka's state visit to Indonesia in 1974 (Ricklefs 1993).

Seen against this background, ASEAN interests centered on a better access to the European market and a price stabilization scheme (STABEX) for agricultural commodities (Dreis-Lampen 1998:121; Yeung/Perdikis/Kerr 1999:80). Other objectives included attracting more European investment, promoting technology transfers and receiving more development aid. Achievements, however, were mixed. Positive, on a first glance, was the almost ten-fold increase of trade between 1971 and 1979 (Dreis-Lampen 1998:119; Yeung/Perdikis/Kerr 1999:83) and the accelerated influx of European investments into Southeast Asia temporarily outgrowing even American and Japanese investments (Bridges 1999:79). Noteworthy is also the change in the composition of trade. By the end of the 1980s the percentage of manufactured products among traded goods had risen from 23.8 percent to 60 percent (Dreis-Lampen 1998:119), thus gradually eliminating the old colonial trade structure with its exchange of primary goods for finished products.

But neither the increase of the trade volume nor the increase of European investments significantly altered the economic position of the Triadic powers in the ASEAN region. Although new economic opportunities were opened for ASEAN through the European link, balancing effects remained limited. Moreover, it is questionable to what extent intensified economic cooperation could be attributed to interregional relations. The EC General Systems of Preferences (GSP), to which ASEAN had access right from the beginning, was launched already by 1971, i.e. one year prior to the first direct contacts between the two regional organizations. Interregional relations also did not decisively help ASEAN to rise in the EC's preferential hierarchy which in the 1970s and 1980s was topped by former British and French colonies in Africa, the Caribbean and the Pacific (ACP) and Mediterranean countries. Through the *Lomé Treaties* and special preferential agreements, both groups of countries received trade benefits more favorable than the

general preferences given by the EC to other developing countries. Nevertheless, at least to some extent, ASEAN was able to negotiate concessions from the EC which resulted in some „GSP plus“ treatment but failed to include a STABEX scheme (Dreis-Lampen 1998:121). Moreover, ASEAN complaints over the EU's alleged protectionist policies including the frequent use of antidumping legislation continued unabated throughout the entire period. Commodity agreements such as the one signed on tapioca imposed ceilings on Southeast Asian exports and thus did little to allay ASEAN complaints. The Multifibre Agreement (MFA) with its quota regulations and Voluntary Export Restraints (VERs) further restricted ASEAN exports into the EU in other areas where the grouping enjoyed comparative advantages (Chee 1997:16). Finally, EC development aid was likewise a disappointment for ASEAN as on a per capita basis it remained well below the one granted to ACP countries. Yet, by all these limitations, capturing a staggering 42 percent of the EC's trade with developing countries, ASEAN was the main beneficiary of the European GSP (Bridges 1999:77).

Although Langhammer is probably right concluding that through collective bargaining ASEAN achieved more than through individual negotiations of its members (Langhammer 1987:143; Bridges 1999:79), all in all, at least in the economic sphere, it is hardly deniable that ASEAN-EC relations remained a highly asymmetrical donor-recipient relationship (Indorf 1987:91). In 1989, ASEAN had a share of only 3.1 percent in the EC's trade – a mere 0.5 percent increase since 1980 -- , while, conversely, the EC's share of ASEAN's trade was lingering at around 15 percent (Ak-rasane 1982:25-26; Dreis-Lampen 1998:118). It is thus hardly a sign of European arrogance to conclude that the EC was much more important for ASEAN than ASEAN for the EC (Rieger 1991:38).

The economic rationale for closer relations with Europe was paralleled by security concerns, qualifying claims in the literature which attribute the rise of interregionalism more or less exclusively to globalization. By the early 1970s there was no doubt left that, as a result of their debacle in Vietnam, the United States would markedly reduce military presence in Asia. This, at least, was the unambiguous message of the *Nixon Doctrine* announced as early as 1969. ASEAN members, with their pro-Western and anti-

communist orientation, and, except for Indonesia and Malaysia, strongly relying on US military support, would henceforth be faced with the victorious communist regimes in Indochina and a more assertive People's Republic of China (Snitwongse 1989:229). To make things worse, American disengagement coincided with a British withdrawal from positions east of Suez which – despite maintaining a token presence in Southeast Asia through the Five Power Defence Agreement (FPDA) -- was finished by 1971. ASEAN responded to these changes by strengthening regional cohesion, but also by broadening its diplomatic support base (Dreis-Lampen 1998:88). Europe – though hitherto basically an inward-looking player without much actor capacity in the field of foreign relations -- was seen as a pivotal partner in this respect. Still, for much of the pre-1990 era, political cooperation rarely went beyond the declaratory level.

One of these occasions was the Soviet-supported occupation of Cambodia through Vietnamese troops in December 1978 and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan one year later which gave a more concrete meaning to security-related affinities between the two groupings (Teo 1985:119; Regelsberger 1989:84; Rüländ 1996a:18). Both partners shared concerns over what they perceived as a looming Soviet security threat which in the case of the EC was exacerbated by the deployment of SS-20 missiles targetting Western Europe and in the case of ASEAN by the modernization of the Soviet Pacific fleet to a formidable blue water navy and the acquisition of naval bases in Vietnam. The communiqués of the ministerial meetings persistently highlighted these issues throughout the 1980s. Common interests to contain or at least balance growing Soviet influence in Europe and Southeast Asia translated into coordinated diplomatic moves which – as we shall see later – centered on the annual United Nations General Assembly (Snitwongse 1989).

If realists highlight the balancing aspects and gauge ASEAN-EC relations on this basis, institutionalists make the institution-building, agenda-setting and rationalizing functions the litmus test for ASEAN-EC relations. Indeed, a dense network of institutions has evolved through ASEAN-EC cooperation. The beginning was made through ASEAN's Special Coordinating Committee (SCAN) which was set up in 1972 with the objective of con-

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ducting an institutionalized dialogue with the EC. In the same year, the ASEAN Brussels Committee (ABC) was created (Snitwongse 1989:229). Composed of ASEAN diplomatic representatives accredited to the EC, it served as a liaison body in Brussels and as ASEAN's ear at the pulse of European affairs. Later ambassadorial committees were established in Bonn, Paris and London, which meet on an annual basis with the host country's foreign minister. The EC, apart from Delegations the first of which it opened in Bangkok in 1978, also established such committees in ASEAN capitals (Indorf 1987; Mols 1989). In 1975, relations became more formalized through the creation of a Joint Study Group comprising ASEAN and EC officials. Meanwhile, in Brussels ASEAN ambassadors had entered into a regular dialogue with the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER) of the EC Council of Ministers.

By the end of the 1970s a full-fledged interregional dialogue – on the EC side tirelessly advocated by the former German Foreign Minister Hans-Dietrich Genscher – had emerged (Chiang 1981: 330; Teo 1985:118). A first foreign ministers' meeting was held in 1978. Since then ministerial meetings became a regular event. Hosted alternately by ASEAN and EC members, eleven ministerial meetings were held every eighteen months between 1978 and 1994, seven of them prior to 1990. In addition, since the early 1980s ASEAN and EC foreign ministers also met annually under the format of the ASEAN Postministerial Conferences (PMC) – consultations ASEAN holds with its dialogue partners following its own annual Foreign Minister's Meeting (AMM). In 1985 the first economic ministers' meeting convened which, however, came together only intermittently (Pretzell 1996:163). Finally, in the late 1980s, in a move to systematically promote European investments in the region, the EC established Joint Investment Committees (JICs) in all ASEAN capitals (Dreis-Lampen 1998:126).

Interregional cooperation also extended to the parliamentary level. A dialogue between members of the European Parliament and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentarian Organization (AIPO) takes place every eighteen months since 1975. Until 1996 ten meetings were held (Dreis-Lampen 1998:143). The European Parliament also has observer status at the annual AIPO general assemblies. However, parliamentary cooperation has been far from

smooth as the European Parliament – unlike EC governments and the Commission – repeatedly harshly criticized ASEAN governments for human rights violations and democratic deficits (Dreis-Lampen 1998:144).

The core of the ASEAN-EC relationship became a cooperation agreement, signed in Kuala Lumpur in March 1978. It was initially concluded for a five year term, after which it was to be renewed every two years, subject to the right of either party to terminate it by written notice given six months in advance of expiry. The agreement was extended to Brunei in 1985, after the latter had become a member of ASEAN. A Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) meeting at least once a year was assigned to prepare, coordinate, implement and supervise the projects under the agreement (Dreis-Lampen 1998:116). The cooperation agreement became a model for additional interregional relationships initiated by the EC such as with the Andean Group in 1983, Central American countries in 1984, the African front line states and the Gulf Cooperation Council in 1986 (Regelsberger 1989:88; Lukas 1989:103).

Yet, most observers concur that the cooperation agreement failed to establish a special relationship between the two regional organizations (Leifer 1998:203). The wording was vague, confined to expressions of intent and general principles such as mutual respect, nondiscrimination, facilitation and diversification of trade, reduction of (non-tariff) trade barriers, technological and development cooperation. In so far as the intensified economic cooperation mentioned above is taken as an indicator for a successful development of mutual ties, it has only marginally been influenced by the institutionalization of EC-ASEAN relations. Increases in trade and investment must basically be attributed to ASEAN's dynamic export-oriented industrialization (EOI) drive, a favorable business climate and the high economic growth rates enjoyed by ASEAN members throughout much of the 1970s and 1980s (Dreis-Lampen 1998; Bridges 1999; Yeung/Perdikis/Kerr 1999; Robles 2001).

Somewhat greater than on economic cooperation was the impact of institution-building on the political dialogue which grew out of the 1980 cooperation agreement and – unlike in the case of ASEM – was established on the

explicit desire of ASEAN (Teo 1985:117). While in general agenda-setting and rationalization functions have played only a subordinate role in the initial period of ASEAN-EC relations⁴, the political dialogue has at least somewhat stimulated these functions. The EC and ASEAN have, for instance, acted as agenda setters in the case of the Indochinese refugees, bringing the issue to the attention of global organizations such as the United National High Commission on Refugees (UNHCR). Yet, sharp disagreements over the treatment of refugees by ASEAN members and the slow pace of resettlement through European countries cannot be overlooked. Agenda-setting also took place with regard to the Cambodia and Afghanistan conflicts which ASEAN and the EC helped to elevate to the UN General Assembly. EC-ASEAN cooperation was a major factor behind the annual resolutions of the General Assembly condemning the invasions (Hong 1998:214). However, in this case, too, the smooth wording of the joint communiqués following ASEAN-EC ministerial meetings glossed over divergent views. Some members of the EC, for instance, were far from happy over the inclusion of the genocidal Khmer Rouge in the Kampuchean Coalition Government supported by ASEAN. Also, with regard to Vietnam, not all EC members shared their partners' view of isolating that country and excluding it from European aid (Regelsberger 1989:84; Snitwongse 1989:231). As a result, critics contend, political cooperation, too, stagnated (Regelsberger 1989:84) and was far from „realizing its potentials“ (Yeung/Perdikis/Kerr 1999). Although the consultations usually covered a broad range of topics including the apartheid regime in South Africa and the Arab-Israeli conflict, they were little more than a very loose *tour de horizon*, mired in symbolism and without major consequences for the policies of both sides (Indorf 1987:98).

While from the preceding paragraphs the conclusion may be drawn that the EC and ASEAN established many channels of communication, such a view tends to overlook the fact that the underlying institutions are rather shallow, loose and essentially based on „soft legalization“ (Abbott/Snidal 2000).

4 For examples see Snitwongse (1989:232).

There are no binding obligations flowing out of them which are called for if the agenda-setter and the rationalizer functions are to be further developed.

Several factors help explain this low level of institutionalization. First, the EC initially attached low priority to its relations with ASEAN, and was therefore unwilling to invest much into the development of common institutions. The frequent absence of European foreign ministers from meetings is expression of this state of affairs which was perceived by ASEAN counterparts as an affront (Snitwongse 1989:256; Pretzell 1996). Second, „deep institutionalization“ is at variance with ASEAN’s principles of cooperation. The much touted *ASEAN Way* highlights „relationship-building“ instead of „institution-building“ (Ba 1997) and thus emphasizes principles such as consensus, personalism, flexibility, pragmatism, intergovernmentalism and, most essential, noninterference into the internal affairs of partners (Dosch 1993; Acharya 1997). Third, if balancing has been a major rationale for ASEAN-EC cooperation, the need for „deep institutionalization“ is indeed limited. As the constellation leading to an interregional coalition may change, costly investments into institutions will be avoided. However, such a low level of institutionalization also limits the likelihood and the opportunities for institutional learning as an independent effect emanating from international institutions on states’ behavior.

Interestingly, collective identity-building has been a more important function for ASEAN-EC relations even in the initial period of cooperation. Interregionalism has helped both organizations developing actorness and gaining stature as international players. For ASEAN close relations with the most advanced regional organization had a prestige-enhancing effect within and outside the own region. Recognition is certainly a factor strengthening the legitimacy and, as a corollary, the internal cohesion of an organization. As for the EC, interregional relations boosted the fledgling European Political Cooperation (EPC). It thus no accident that when the EPC for the first time received a legal basis in the *Single European Act*, the *Act* also explicitly mentioned cooperation with other regional groupings as a major purpose (Regelsberger 1989:79). ASEAN, by contrast, had named the development of interregional relations a *raison d’être* of the organization already in the grouping’s founding declaration. The 7th point of the

Bangkok Declaration charges ASEAN with the task of „maintaining close and beneficial cooperation with existing international and regional organizations with similar aims and purposes“ (Lukas 1989:103).

Yet, the EC intentionally performed the role of an external federator in other ways, too. One such approach was the conception of development projects on a regional scale which forced the recipients to intensify regional coordination and cooperation. Another approach was the introduction of cumulative rules of origin in 1975, which allowed ASEAN members to cooperate in the production of finished products for export to the EC (Lukas 1989:107; Dreis-Lampen 1998:112; Bridges 1999:77; Yeung/Perdikis/May 1999:93).

4. ASEAN and the EU after 1990: From Bilateral Interregionalism to Transregionalism

The collapse of socialism opened a new chapter of ASEAN-EC relations. From a realist perspective the transformation of Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union can be read as a victory of the West over its Eastern adversaries. No wonder that in the triumphalist mood following the end of the Cold War, Western powers staged an effort to impose their values on the non-Western world. With the end of bipolarity, and seemingly relieved of the need for support in the bloc confrontation, even friendly authoritarian regimes in the Third World were increasingly viewed as an embarrassment by the West. This thinking is perhaps best reflected in President George Bush's proclamation of a New World Order attaching universalist meaning to liberal democracy, human rights, market economy and disarmament. By the early 1990s many Western countries including the EU had embarked on a policy of conditionality, linking development aid to compliance with these values. The Western value offensive may well be understood as an attempt to build „soft power“ (Nye 1990) which in the face of diffusing and less effective military power increasingly determines a nation state's ability to influence international affairs.

In Asia – and other parts of the Third World – this was regarded as a thinly veiled strategy to establish a unipolar world order and to impose a new Pax

Americana on the rest of the world. Asian governments thus increasingly opposed Western value-based policies and began to denounce them as neo-colonialism and cultural hegemonism. As a consequence, controversies between ASEAN and EC, which before 1990 were mainly confined to economic issues, entered the political sphere (Harris/Bridges 1983:47). Until 1990 democracy and human rights had played a marginal role at best in official ASEAN-EC relations. Occasional criticism of human rights violations in Indonesia or a lack of democracy elsewhere in the region, was mainly aired by NGOs, the European Parliament (Snitwongse 1989:256) or – if coming from official quarters -- was raised quietly. The perhaps only exception of European comments on the internal affairs of an ASEAN member was the Philippine People Power's Revolution in 1986. The fall from power of strongman Ferdinand E. Marcos was enthusiastically greeted in the West and European governments rushed to commit themselves in support of the new administration under President Corazon Aquino (Regelsberger 1989:86).

Clashes over values marked the 9th and 10th ministerial meetings held in Manila and Luxembourg in 1991 and 1992. They were sparked by demands of the EC to include human rights and democracy clauses in an updated „third generation“ cooperation agreement which was to replace the Kuala Lumpur document of 1980 (Schumacher/Hampe 1999). Tensions rose further after the killing of unarmed demonstrators by Indonesian security forces in Dili, East Timor, in November 1991. ASEAN's accommodating policy of „constructive engagement“ vis-a-vis the discredited military junta in Burma did little to dispel them. The Burmese State Law and Order Restoration Committee (SLORC) had a reputation in the West as one of the worst human rights violators in Asia. When finally around 1993, ASEAN began to counter Western universalism with Asian cultural relativism through propagating the now infamous Asian value hypothesis, ASEAN-EC relations were caught in a stalemate.⁵

5 The literature on Asian values is now abundant. See, inter alia, Ishihara (1992); Mahbubani (1993, 1995); Kausikan (1993), Zakaria (1994); Jones (1994); Mahathir (1995); Mahathir and Ishihara (1995); Heinz (1995); Mols and Derichs (1995); Rüländ (1996); Senghaas (1998).

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However, viewed from the realist perspective, interregional relations were more than merely an arena for clashing concepts of soft power. In view of widespread Asian fears over the completion of the European Single Market and an anticipated „Fortress Europe“, interregionalism also mirrored shifts in the economic balance of power within the Triad. Special trade arrangements in the form of European Treaties, paving the way to the eastern enlargement of the EC/EU, were suspected as diverting trade and investment from ASEAN. Similar effects would emanate from a „graduation mechanism“ built in by the EU into its GSP scheme which would incrementally reduce benefits as countries climb up the economic hierarchy. ASEAN as one of the world’s few developmental success stories would definitely fall under the new regulation (Chee 1997:20). Moreover, the uncertainties surrounding the Uruguay Round of GATT – not least caused by European intransigence over agricultural policies – led the Asian side into playing a new balancing game. Although initially only hesitantly responding to the formation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) (Weatherbee 1989) – a transregional forum founded in late 1989 on Japanese and Australian initiative -- Asians began to appreciate APEC’s value as a balancing device against Europeans. The ratification of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) through US Congress in November 1993 and APEC’s show of force at the Seattle Summit a few days later finally extracted European GATT concessions and facilitated the completion of the Uruguay Round a few months later (Rüland 1996a, 1999a; Roloff 1998; 2001; Hänggi 1999).

For Europeans a protracted economic recession at home was perhaps of even greater concern. The resultant fears of becoming economically – and in the long run politically -- marginalized in an emerging Pacific Century were instrumental in effecting another major change in the EU’s ASEAN policy. The 11th ministerial meeting held in Karlsruhe, Germany, in September 1994, thus saw a return to more pragmatic policies and the down-toning of value-related issues. Accordingly, the meeting’s format and style basically followed ASEAN’s terms, concentrating on areas of common (economic) interest, while bracketing controversial (political) themes. The new „Spirit of Karlsruhe“ paved the way for launching the Asia-Europe

Meeting (ASEM), a nascent transregional forum first proposed by Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in October 1994.⁶

After the first Summit in March 1996, ASEM increasingly absorbed the ASEAN-EC biregional dialogue which after 1997 went into a process of atrophy. Although another ministerial meeting took place in Singapore in February 1997, the relationship was soon overshadowed by an intensifying controversy over Burma following the latter's acceptance as a new member by ASEAN in July 1997. The EU, which had earlier imposed sanctions on the Burmese junta, rejected ASEAN and Burmese demands for participation in the dialogue by arguing that the Burmese military rulers have failed to open a dialogue with the opposition and to release political prisoners.

The ensuing impasse in the ASEAN-EC dialogue is to a great extent the result of another change in the Triadic power equation. While the Asian financial crisis has seriously undermined ASEAN's internal cohesion and external clout, it emboldened the EU to return to its previous value-based foreign policy. As both sides were unable, and unwilling, to compromise on Burma, JCC meetings were postponed for more than two years and the ministerial meetings for nearly three years. The deadlock was only broken after protracted negotiations in May 2000 when, finally, the EU allowed Burma to attend JCC meetings along with the other new members of the ASEAN – Laos and Cambodia – provided that none of their representatives speaks at the meeting. However, while Laos and Cambodia were admitted to the ASEAN-EU Cooperation Agreement in July 2000, the EU still opposed the accession of Burma. Nevertheless, Burma was allowed to attend the 13th ministerial meeting held in December 2000 in Vientiane, Laos. The EU, however, insisted that the human rights situation in Burma was not only part of the meeting's agenda, but would also be included in the joint declaration.⁷ Thus, beyond the fact that it took place at all, the Vientiane ministerial meeting did little to get the ASEAN-EC dialogue back on

6 For details, see Rüländ (1996).

7 See Vientiane Declaration. The Thirteenth Ministerial Meeting, Vientiane, 11-12 December 2000, Point 9 and 10.

track. It was marred by heated exchanges over human rights issues and a low level of European attendance.⁸

After 1990, the ASEAN-EC relationship's main contribution to institution-building was the launching of ASEM which will be discussed in greater detail below. Under the bi-regional dialogue European Business Information Centres (EBICs) were set up in Manila (1993), Kuala Lumpur, Bangkok, Singapore and Jakarta (1995) and an Eminent Persons' Group (EPG) entrusted with inhaling new visions into the ASEAN-EU relationship (Rüland 1996a:52; Chee 1997:13; Dreis-Lampen 1998:126; Robles 2001:27).⁹ A Commission policy paper, entitled „Towards a New Asia Strategy“ -- approved by the EU Summit in Essen (1994) and the European Parliament in 1995 -- made ASEAN a cornerstone of Europe's relations with Asia, but went far beyond discussing ASEAN-EC relations (Rüland 1996a). In May 2000, the JCC finalized a new strategy paper – the „EU-ASEAN Work Programme“ – providing guidelines for future ASEAN-EC cooperation. However, its relevance has already been subjected to doubts by recent news from Brussels that the Commission is in the process of revising its 1994 Asia strategy paper, and henceforth may be giving greater priority to East Asia and India than to ASEAN.¹⁰

Finally, despite the turbulences in the relationship, the EC continued to act as an external federator for ASEAN even after 1990. ASEAN access to European Investment Bank (EIB) financing -- long demanded by ASEAN -- was finally granted by the EC at the 10th ministerial meeting in Manila, but linked to projects fostering regional integration, closer relations between Europe and Asia, or resulting in environmental improvements (Robles 2001:22). The unintentional part of ASEAN identity-building through interregionalism was facilitated through the value controversies. Even if its mythological character can hardly be overlooked (Rüland 1996b), the Asian value hypothesis has at least temporarily strengthened ASEAN as a

8 For details, see reporting in *The Straits Times* and *The Nation Review* between 8 and 13 December 2000.

9 The Eminent Persons' Group, formed in January 1994; submitted a report „A New Strategy for a New Partnership“ in June 1996.

10 See *Far Eastern Economic Review*, 12 July 2001, p. 12.

regional entity. However, under the impact of the Asian financial crisis not only the Asian value hypothesis crumbled, but ASEAN solidarity, too (Acharya 1999; Rüländ 2000a, 2001).

5. *The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): The Rise of Transregionalism*

Many of the functions of the ASEAN-EC dialogue have been taken over by two new transregional fora: The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) (Pelkmans 1997:49). As the European involvement in the ARF is rather limited and partly overlapping with ASEM, we concentrate in the following paragraphs on ASEM.¹¹

As mentioned earlier, an Asia-Europe Summit, nonexistent under the ASEAN-EC bi-regional format, was first proposed by Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong in Paris in October 1994. While membership in the ASEM was initially contested, an agreement was finally reached that ASEM would include the fifteen members of the EU plus the European Commission, the then seven members of ASEAN plus China, Japan and South Korea. The first of so far three summits took place in Bangkok in March 1996.

Not surprisingly, realists tend to view the emergence of ASEM mainly in balancing terms. The perceptions of a forthcoming Pacific Century, reflecting gravitational shifts in the global economy and the Triadic power equation (Roloff 1998, 2001; Hänggi 1999), that have already spurred major changes in Europe's Asia Policy at the Karlsruhe ministerial meeting in 1994, have also been key motivations for the European participation in ASEM. For Europeans, the inclusion of East Asian economic heavy weights China, Japan and South Korea in the forum held much attraction, while ASEAN hoped to benefit from the inclusion of East Asia by increasing its bargaining power. ASEM was thus a welcome device to balance the

11 The subsequent section follows closely a paper presented by the author at the Third ASEM Summer School in Lund, Sweden on 17 August 2001.

changing geoeconomic fortunes and to give Europe a new foothold in the world's economically most dynamic region.

Although the Asian economic miracle seemingly endowed Asians with a greater leverage, for them, too, ASEM provided a valuable balancing device. Many in Pacific Asia regarded US activism in APEC as a thinly veiled strategy for pressing open Asian markets in an attempt to reduce Washington's huge trade deficit with the economies of the Western Pacific. ASEM was thus seen as a chance curtailing American influence in the region. Yet, it was also a device balancing European and American moves to revitalize their transatlantic partnership. For Europeans the *New Transatlantic Agenda* of 1995 served as a move to halt the perceived shift of American interests from the Atlantic to the Pacific, for Americans it was a move to counter the evolving Asian-European alliance under ASEM. But worries over a new American isolation following the Republican triumph in the 1994 Congressional elections and old concerns over European protectionism likewise motivated ASEAN to take the lead in the creation of ASEM. After all, despite a relative decline, Europe was still a major market for ASEAN exports. European antidumping measures, moves of the European Commission to phase out tariff concessions ASEAN countries enjoyed since 1971 and the progress made on the way towards a European Monetary Union (EMU) alarmed the Asian side and kept alive the ghost of a „*Fortress Europe*“.¹² Moreover, ASEAN saw in ASEM a useful tool to counter European activities to establish free trade agreements with other regional organizations such as the MERCOSUR and SADC or large emerging markets such as South Africa and Mexico. Finally, and this was perhaps the most important common denominator, ASEM seemed to promise increased bargaining options for both sides in global fora.

Beyond its functions of a balancer, ASEM has made a modest contribution to international institution-building at three levels. Firstly by establishing a „missing link“ in Triad relations, secondly by a creeping institutionaliza-

12 Fears of a Fortress Europe were widely aired in Asia since the passing of the European Single Act in 1986.

tion of ASEM itself and thirdly by institutionalizing East Asian cooperation.

Not much needs to be said about the „missing link“ argument. Complementing transatlantic and transpacific relations, ASEM completed the evolving structures of transregionalism. Yet ASEM is still a weak forum. Reflecting the power equation at the time of the forum's formation, the Asian side succeeded in defining cooperation principles patterned after the *ASEAN Way*. ASEM was thus designed as a nonbinding, informal, consensus-oriented consultative forum without institutions and a pre-agreed agenda. The Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF) endorsed by ASEM-2 in London (1998)¹³ and more elaborated by ASEM-3 in Seoul (2000) confirmed these principles (Hund 1998).

Yet, their aversion vis-à-vis formal institutions notwithstanding, the architects of ASEM could not prevent a process of creeping institutionalization (Bersick 1999a; Lim 2000a). As ASEM got a promising start at the inaugural Bangkok Summit in March 1996, interactions inevitably intensified over the next few years. Bi-annual summits, various ministerial rounds including the foreign, finance, economic ministers, environmental and education ministers, Senior Officials' Meetings (SOM), the creation of an Asia-Europe Business Forum and the establishment of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) contributed to this process of shallow institutionalization. The intellectual exchanges and peoples-to-peoples links promoted by ASEF, the inauguration of track two processes by the Council of Asia-Europe Cooperation (CAEC) and think tanks of both regions, the rise of epistemic communities including the appointment of an Asia-Europe Vision Group and the formation of an Asia-Europe People's Forum organizing NGO parallel summits with an alternative agenda have helped to create personal and institutional networks hitherto unseen in Euro-Asian relations. Still lacking, however, is an ASEM secretariat.

Perhaps the most pivotal contribution ASEM has made to institution-building is its impact on East Asian cooperation. In fact, ASEM has *de*

13 See Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework, Senior Officials' Meeting, London, 20 February 1998, http://europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/asem/asem_process/aecf.htm.

facto brought into being Malaysian Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad's long cherished, yet controversial proposal of an East Asian Economic Grouping/Caucus (EAEG/EAEC). It did not go unnoticed that the ten Asian members of ASEM fully coincide with the EAEC membership envisioned by Mahathir. Perhaps even more important for East Asian cooperation than this sheer coincidence became the increasingly urgent need to match the superior coordinative machinery of the EU. The need to work out common positions paved the way for Asian caucuses prior to ASEM meetings and the nomination of two Asian coordinators (Soesastro/Nuttall 1997; Synnott 1999; Hänggi 2000).

East Asian cooperation got an additional push in the aftermath of the Asian financial crisis (Rüland 1999b; Higgott 2000). As ASEAN learnt the painful lesson that the organization is too weak to manage a major economic crisis on its own, ASEAN sought to strengthen its bargaining power by closer cooperation with Northeast Asia. In December 1997, at the sidelines of its First Informal Summit in Kuala Lumpur, ASEAN organized the first East Asian Summit. Since then, these summits have become a regular occurrence and are now an integral part of ASEAN's annual informal summits. ASEAN+3 Cooperation was further boosted by the *Joint Statement on East Asia Cooperation* concluded at ASEAN's informal Manila Summit in November 1999. Already in the year before, East Asian ministerial rounds involving finance and environmental ministers had been launched. Japan had proposed Senior Officials' Meetings, South Korea the formation of an East Asian Vision Group. Another noteworthy step towards closer East Asian cooperation was the *Chiang Mai Initiative* which by some observers is prematurely viewed as the nucleus of an Asian Monetary Fund (AMF) (Dieter 2000; Higgott 2001). Yet, even giving due recognition to these efforts of broadening Asian cooperation, nothing would be more wrong than to portray them as an incipient process of deep institutionalization. So far they are little more than moves to balance resurgent Western economic prowess and to pool bargaining power in global fora. Taking into account the diversity of interests among major Asian players such as China, Japan and Indonesia, it is difficult to see how East Asian cooperation will go beyond that point in the near future.

As explained earlier, transregional fora may also serve as rationalizers and agenda-setters of global institutions. Unfortunately, so far, ASEM has achieved little in these terms. Talks at the senior officials' level to define common Euro-Asian positions prior to the WTO ministerial meeting held in Singapore in late 1996 failed to produce tangible results (Gode-ment/Jacquet 1997:71). Still very much in line with the economic power equation prior to the Asian financial crisis, Asian views prevailed in transferring the labor standards issue to the International Labor Organization (ILO), only to resurface on the WTO agenda three years later after the economic fortunes have taken a dramatic turn around. ASEM – like APEC two years earlier – also failed to agree on principles of an investment code patterned after the abortive *Multilateral Agreement on Investment* (MAI) as proposed by the OECD (Chee 1997:23). In the case of the WTO chairmanship Europeans backtracked in their support of Asian candidate Supachai Panichpakdi. Perhaps ASEM's greatest flaw was its failure – again in consonance with APEC – to agree on the modalities of a new WTO millenium trade liberalization round. While Europeans lobbied for a comprehensive round and the US preferred sectoral liberalization, several developing Asian countries pressed for the prior implementation of the Uruguay Round agreements (Baumann 1999).

Compared to APEC, which is essentially confined to trade issues, ASEM pursues a broader format. On the insistence of Europeans, ASEM also developed a political dialogue which on paper is well suited for performing agenda-setting and rationalizing functions. Unfortunately, however, what Asian and European diplomats ritually praise as a frank and open political dialogue has rarely been more than a typical euphemism of Asian-style diplomacy. With a few exceptions, sensitive issues such as East Timor, Burma, democracy and human rights have been bracketed. If it achieved anything, the political dialogue at best enhanced transparency of policy positions, thus creating greater predictability for negotiations in global fora. Yet, as Asian and European positions lay far apart in many issues, this amounted to little more than the predictabilty of disagreement.

ASEM has however avoided to further dilute its shallow institutions by widening. Despite some twenty-five applications for membership in 1998,

ASEM-2 and ASEM-3 did not accept new members. The membership moratorium, however, had a fortunate side effect for ASEAN-EU relations. It enabled the two organizations to sidestep the Burma issue and keep inter-regional communication intact.

Identity-building primarily occurred on the Asian side (Camroux/Lechervy 1996; Gilson 1998; Hänggi 2000). Here, ASEM has indeed helped to construct the notion of an East Asian region with a set of common cultural values and a core of shared interests. This identity-building and the intensification of East Asian cooperation as described above are mutually reinforcing processes.

6. *Whither ASEAN-EU Relations*

Our study of ASEAN-EU interregionalism presents five major conclusions. First, while revealing potential for being a building block in an emerging system of global governance, ASEAN-EU interregionalism is still riddled with serious problems. One such problem is that – like other interregional relationships too -- ASEAN-EU interregionalism basically performs balancing functions. This reduces incentives for deepening inter- and transregional institutions. Although the EU has an interest in developing a more contractual and legalistic form of interregionalism, it is undermining efforts of institutionalizing the relationship by a highly opportunistic policy (Rüland 1996a). The EU's policy vis-à-vis ASEAN lacks direction and strongly responds to changing power relations. Its pre- and post-Asian crisis value policy is indicative of this.

Second, if ASEAN-EU relations, and interregionalism in general, are to develop into building blocks for global governance, more institutionalization of these relations is definitely needed. If, on the other hand, the present low level of institutionalization persists, there is little likelihood that the relationship will ever transcend the present state of low politics characterized by a laundry list of uncoordinated projects. European post-Asian crisis policies have clearly shown that such kind of token multilateralism generates little public interest in Europe and thus makes it difficult for less my-

opic political forces to justify higher than present institutional costs of interregional relationships.

Third, by creating parallel structures including ASEAN-EU ministerial meetings and ASEM, Euro-Asian interregionalism has contributed to redundancy in international institution-building. ASEM reflects ASEAN's lack of political clout in global fora and is increasingly taking over functions of the previous bi-regional relationship. The latter is not entirely fading away, but increasingly falling into a status of irrelevance as the most recent ministerial meeting in Vientiane suggests. Yet, ASEM has kept the relationship alive as it offered a way out of the „Burma conundrum“ (Bridges 1999:88).

Fourth, the poor performance of ASEM (and APEC) in managing the Asian crisis has undoubtedly eroded the legitimacy of inter- and transregional fora. Even more undermining their legitimacy is the utter lack of democratic transparency of these dialogues. Increasingly they appear as arcane expert talks with very little feed back by and from the grass-roots, represented either by national parliaments or civil society. Except for the business fora, interregional parliamentary and civil society discourses are only very weakly, if at all, institutionally connected to the official track one (Lim 2000b). Although ASEF is well performing the important task of nurturing peoples-to-peoples contacts (Bersick 1999b), it is a fact that by placing them under the tutelage of ASEF, civil society has been isolated from track one.

Fifth, while the response of ASEM to the Asian crisis was less than satisfactory and thus has contributed to doubts over the forum, ASEM-3, though not being a breakthrough to a revitalized partnership, has nevertheless created new perspectives. The Asian side, however, was adamantly upholding its aversion against further institutionalization of the relationship. Yet, as remarks by South Korean President Kim Dae-jung quoted in the press suggest, there are cracks in the Asian phalanx.¹⁴ Moreover, it is also a step in the right direction if summiteers agreed that the political dialogue should take a more focused form in the future (Rüländ 2000b; Köllner 2000). Con-

14 See Korea Herald, 21 October 2000 (Internet).

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centrating the political dialogue on one or two key issues could be a point of departure for developing more binding positions which, introduced into global fora, could make a greater impact on decision-making there. Noteworthy is also the initiation of a parliamentary dialogue at the sidelines of ASEM which needs to be nurtured further. Yet, reflecting the increasing economic stratification of Asia, European interests, will however shift to China and the rest of East Asia and, to a lesser extent, to India. For ASEAN this means that it will have to struggle to maintain its central position in Euro-Asian relations.

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