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Does the EU Matter in the ‘Asian’ Century?

Michael Reiterer

Abstract: The headlines news of rising China, ensuing great power competition with the US, ASEAN’s strife to maintain a ‘central’ role and Japan’s eagerness to regain a stronger role formerly held – all these developments pose the question of the role and relevance of the EU in the Asia-Pacific. As the largest economy world-wide on aggregate there is the expectation for the EU to play a commensurate role in international politics and to master the serious challenges it is facing. Based on the Treaty of Lisbon the EU has developed a policy framework for Asia which is currently updated and further developed. Featuring a ‘comprehensive’ approach the High Representative/Vice President strives to integrate foreign, trade and development policies, engage in crisis management and pursue the ever evolving area of non-traditional security threats. Given the interdependence of Asia and Europe the EU and Asia are important stake-holders in each other’s security. The paper outlines the EU’s objectives in Asia in the bi- (free trade and political framework agreements) and multilateral context (ASEAN, ARF, ASEM, NAPCI...). Increased public diplomacy activities should help to translate these activities into a better perception of the EU in Asia – often known to the expert but not to the respective publics and policy-makers.

1) The challenge of Asia

The EU has engaged in recent years in a process of dynamic consolidation of its relationship with Asia and the Pacific – no need for another pivot, but rather for raising visibility and presenting a comprehensive approach to Asia, beyond trade and economics.
The latter is crucial: First, trade only is no longer an option; this would miss today’s reality. It would also limit the EU’s perspective and options if it were perceived by its allies and partners primarily as an economic competitor. Second, the “pivot” has not turned out to be a useful concept; some perceive it as encirclement/containment, others as primarily a military concept or just a public relations slogan without real impact – the US itself changed for “rebalancing”.

The EU and its Member States have substantial interests in the region. The EU remains Asia’s largest trading partner and economic interdependence between the two regions has reached unprecedented levels which remains the strong basis for the inter-regional relationship on which to build. Uncontrolled conflict or crisis in the region would have a systemic global impact. Therefore the EU has a profound interest in seeing that Asia and the Pacific follow a path of economic development, democratisation, regional cooperation and peace.

The EU has four of its ten Strategic Partners in Asia (China, India, Japan, and Korea) and needs strong commitment from influential Asian partners to tackle global challenges such as climate change and environmental sustainability, the fight against poverty, terrorism, non-proliferation, cyber security, illegal migration and human trafficking. Working towards de-radicalisation or even better the prevention of radicalisation of certain groups should be added as a new element.

Above all, there are signs of a growing recognition, in parts of Asia, of the EU’s relevance as a constructive player and factor of balance in the regional security equation – the EU needs to build upon this “demand for Europe”. Many Asian countries want to hedge instead of taking sides, for which the EU, neither being the US nor China, is a viable and preferred option.

However, in order to achieve this end, the EU has to master the key challenge, namely to prove that it can be a united, credible and effective partner for Asia and the Pacific. It has to concentrate on the areas where it is best placed to deliver
without over-selling its capability in order to maintain credibility. Thereby the EU will be measured how and how efficiently it deals with its neighbourhood in the East (Ukraine, the Crimean Peninsula, Russia) and South (North Africa, Middle East), the refugee crisis linked in particular to Syria and Libya, avoids Grexit and Brexit and whether the EU will be able to translate its decade-long engagement for climate change into a success story – the 2015 Paris Agreement was an important successful step. Another success story, the Iran nuclear deal, needs implementation too. Last but least, the EU must also be able to adapt to the rapid transformation which Asia and the Pacific are currently undergoing.

**Key challenges** in the region include

(i) the current weakness in major advanced economies, which affects Asia’s own export prospects, growth and development gains; latest growth figure for China for 2015: 6.9%,

(ii) the need to pursue market-based reforms to promote sustainable growth, deal with urbanisation, ageing populations in some countries and developing social safety nets;

(iii) deteriorating governance in a number of regionally important countries (Bangladesh, Pakistan, Thailand) and

(iv) a pervasive sense of uncertainty triggered by the transformation of power relations in the region (with China’s growing influence and the counter-reaction by the US), a worrying number of unsettled disputes (Afghanistan, Korean Peninsula, Taiwan Strait, South and East China Seas, India-Pakistan-…), and a significant increase in defence spending throughout the region: SIPRI released in March 2015 the latest figures on arms transfers in the period 2010-2014, identifying Asia and Oceania as the main recipient of weapons accounting for 48% of imports: Among the ten largest exporters China is number three as the only Asian country, supplying in particular Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar. China is also the number 3 importer, while India is number 1, followed by Pakistan as number 5,
Australia 6, South Korea 9 and Singapore 10. Although Europe’s share in exports compared to the 2005-2009 period declined by 16%, five European countries are among the top ten exporters (Germany, France, UK, Spain, Italy).

An intensification of great power competition is inevitable and Asia’s strategic order is evolving fast. However, all countries in the region have a deep interest in stability and economic growth as this has been and continues to be the basis for their success stories. The complex interdependencies at play below the radar screen like tightly knit production networks and growing bilateral engagement are strong stabilising forces also referred to as “Asia’s Paradox” e.g. striving economic relations despite political tensions. Therefore all countries involved have to remain vigilant: while the likelihood of miscalculation and of a major regional conflict might be low, the potential consequences would be high.

2) The EU’s framework

Drawing on its own experience the EU needs therefore to continue playing an active role in supporting bilateral and multilateral efforts to build trust, dialogue and habits of cooperation in the region. This requires energetic and systematic not ad hoc engagement. Asian partners appreciate taking a long-term view. Therefore the EU needs to pursue its more visible engagement since 2012 in firmly embedding Asia in the foreign policy agenda of the relatively new EU leadership, the presidents of the European Council and Commission and the HRVP – despite the hotspots in the European neighbourhood. The yearly summits with Japan, China, and Korea and in principle with India offer the possibility to develop strong personal relations with the respective leaders as well as high level meetings with the leaders of Australia, Indonesia, Afghanistan and other key partners. International meetings like the Shangri-La Security Dialogue, the ARF ministerial meeting and full commitment to the summits and ministerial meetings of the Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM) process complete the picture.
To this end a fresh look on the concepts and the strategy determining European security policy is under way: First, the 2003 European Security Strategy is under review as the world has become more connected but also more contested and complex. Second, East Asia is already a step ahead as the 2007 East Asia Policy Guidelines were updated in 2012, the EU-China 2020 Strategic Cooperation Agenda was adopted, the EU-ASEAN and EU-India Plans of Action are agreed; the new EU Strategy for Afghanistan adopted as well as a strategy for Central Asia which will get more attention because of the Chinese ‘One Belt, One Road’ running through this region.

In addition a joint communication on ASEAN was published in May 2015 to upgrade the engagement with multilateral Asia. The June 2015 Foreign Ministers’ meeting focussed on Asia and adopted Conclusions on EU-ASEAN relations, on forthcoming elections in Myanmar/Burma and on the EU Strategy for Central Asia. These papers and the process leading to their adoption are helpful to promote further prioritisation and coordination with EU Member States and the Commission, which is a pre-requisite for success. They are also visible signs of engagement and convey a strong message of commitment to the Asia Pacific region as a whole, despite crisis in the near abroad. Furthermore, the horizontal European Maritime Security Strategy and the accompanying Action Plan both adopted 2014 are of particular relevance for Asia; this also applies to the 2015 Cyber Security Strategy.

3) Framework Agreements and FTAs
The EU and Asia need each other for growth and economic development, which in turn needs stability and predictability. Therefore, the EU has built in the past few years a dense web of political framework agreements and Free Trade Agreements (FTAs) with countries of Asia which provide a springboard for more mature and broad-based cooperation. The EU’s approach has been to make
the conclusion of any FTA conditional upon the conclusion of a political framework agreement. In introducing a strong political element these agreements underline that the EU is ready to assume not only an economic but also a political role. In the case of Korea a Framework Agreement has been agreed allowing Korea’s participation in the EU’s CSDP missions. Japan might follow soon.

In line with established EU policy, all framework agreements include standard compulsory provisions on issues such as human rights, migration and non-proliferation. The inclusion of such commitments has in some cases proved particularly difficult to negotiate. The negotiation of such framework agreements is underway with Brunei, Japan, Malaysia; initialled with Australia, New Zealand, Afghanistan, Thailand and Singapore, while signed with Mongolia, Philippines and Vietnam; already in force with Indonesia, South Korea and Bangladesh.

Bilateral FTAs are currently under negotiation with varying intensity and speed with Japan, Malaysia, Thailand and India, while scoping talks are underway with Indonesia and the Philippines. The already concluded and implemented FTA with Korea is probably the most advanced FTA in Asia; the first FTA with an ASEAN country, Singapore, is initialled but presently challenged in court for procedural reasons. The agreement with Vietnam was signed. Japan, Malaysia and India are under negotiation, scoping is underway with the Philippines and Indonesia.

These FTAs aim at securing more predictable market access and unlocking the potential for greater investment flows while promoting EU interests against the backdrop of the US-led TPP process. Negotiations with China, Singapore and Myanmar of an investment agreement complete the picture. Although FTA negotiations are being handled by the EU Trade Commissioner, the HRVP has to watch the process given the strong nexus between trade and political influence that exists in Asia.

Access to the EU market remains a major incentive the EU can offer to its partners: concluding FTAs with Korea and Singapore and granting the GSP+ trade
regime to Pakistan has already gained Europe significant political capital in the countries concerned.
In addition to these bilateral approaches, the region-to-region FTA with ASEAN remains on the agenda and last but not least, the EU is dedicated to effective multilateralism: A strong WTO remains the guarantor of the multilateral trading system.

4) Development Aid

Development aid is an important aspect of EU policy in Asia, which is still home to two-thirds of the world’s poorest people. Despite economic constraints and the graduation of six countries, the financial envelope allocated to Asia under the new financial framework for 2014-2020 (Development Cooperation Instrument and the European Development Fund) has increased by around 20%. This takes the form of individual country allocations as well as regional assistance. The region will also get a significant share of funds available under the new “Partnership Instrument”, which is targeted at promoting EU strategic interests (economic presence, regulatory convergence and public diplomacy). Joint programming of aid, in countries like Afghanistan, Myanmar, Cambodia and elsewhere, remains a priority, with uneven levels of buy-in from EU Member States. There would also be room to make a better political use of the leverage which EU aid provides in some parts of the region faced with deteriorating governance (e.g. Bangladesh, Cambodia, Laos).

In sum, Asia presents major opportunities for the EU to seize. The EU’s economic and political interests are directly affected by deep and fast-moving changes in Asia. Therefore reinforcing the engagement with fast-growing Asian economies is an important way in which EU external action can contribute to the new Commission’s important jobs and growth initiative. In this context it will be important to leverage the full-scope partnership with China and ground it in a
well-rounded Asia policy – a China policy is important but not a panacea for an Asian policy.

5) Security
The EU has strong stakes in security in Asia\(^{11}\) - any major escalation of territorial disputes in the region (e.g. South/East China Sea) may have global systemic impact. In today’s globalised world there is no protection by geographical distance! The EU is not a provider of hard security in the region but

(i) it has a track-record of cooperation in soft/non-traditional security in the region (Aceh, Mindanao) and is seen as a constructive and reliable player who is trusted for the integrity of its positions e.g. no hidden major power agenda;

(ii) the ATALANTA anti-piracy operation at the Horn of Africa shows that the EU has the capacity to mobilise effectively hard power and lead the international community, to wield smart power (J. Nye\(^{12}\)). This is of relevance for Asia already now because of the connecting shipping routes and it could become even more relevant as best practice if the need should occur to fight piracy in other parts of Asia. The cooperation with Chinese and Japanese navies in the operation also serves as confidence building measure. More generally, this operation could be the nucleus for developing military-to-military contacts

(iii) the EU’s experience in promoting multilateral security mechanisms on a continental scale (e.g. OSCE) strikes a chord in the absence of any robust structure of this kind to manage tensions in Asia: the invitation by the Korean President Park to join the North East Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI) is a good example.
6) Perspectives
HRVP Mogherini put it clearly during her first appearance at the 2015 Shangri-La Dialogue that the EU will act as a security provider in Europe and beyond in partnership with Asia partners when she invited Asians “... don’t look at us just as a big free trade area: the European Union is also a foreign policy community, a security and defence provider. For our own people - within our borders and in the rest of the world; in our own region - that, we know, at the moment is one of the most turbulent ones, and we are ready to take more responsibility to bring security and stability in our part of the world, together with our neighbours; and with our global partners - Asia included.”

This connects with history: Europe was a significant political and security factor in Asia for centuries. Therefore there is no need to re-invent the wheel but suffice renewing a tradition albeit with an important difference: The EU and its Member States are wielding a policy of partnership and cooperation, entirely different from the colonial past. The EU stands for a post-colonial and to some degree post-modern policy as a non-state actor creating its own foot-print in pursuing a comprehensive foreign policy and therefore pursues strategic objectives.

The EU’s strategic objectives
Leveraging the EU’s Strategic Partnerships on the basis of a clear analysis of European interests needs a serious look at the engagement with China, Japan, Korea and India. Multilateral action on security problems in the EU’s neighbourhood such as Russia/Ukraine, Libya, Syria and the Middle East Peace Process requires engagement with all the EU’s strategic partners.

Building on the 2020 Strategic Cooperation Agenda with China the EU needs to develop a comprehensive and coherent policy towards China with the Member States which takes into account China’s enhanced influence on the region’s politics, security and economic and financial structures and the ensuing effect
on global governance, its outreach towards Europe through the ‘One Belt, One Road’ Initiative and the need to cooperate with China in Europe’s neighbourhood as well as on other continents. To this end a communication will be prepared. Taking the helm to assuring synergies between this Chinese infrastructure initiative and the ASEAN’s Connectivity project (see below) the EU can offer its experience in establishing a connectivity platform. This could strengthen the impact of both projects which is also in the interest of Europe.

**Non-proliferation** concerns with regard to Iran and North Korea are additional examples. The successful conclusion of the deal with Iran concerning the peaceful use of nuclear energy could help in negotiations with North Korea. Engagement on foreign policy and global challenges with Asian partners is essential to realise the EU’s economic, security, development and climate change goals.

Enhancing the EU’s contribution to **security in Asia**, on the basis of the EU’s own efforts in promoting multilateral security structures on a continental scale (e.g. Helsinki 1975-2015). The EU’s main concerns match the Asian ones namely the danger of the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction by the DPRK; concern over the future development around Taiwan; lingering maritime disputes, not least as an expression of China’s policy to assert itself as a regional power.

The **East/South China Sea issues** cannot be solved based on a purely hard security approach. ASEAN could draw inspiration from the EU’s experience and expertise in maritime issues (for instance, common fisheries policy). After the 2013 seminar with ASEAN in Djakarta another one was held in Malaysia in May 2015 where the EU laid out its experience in managing maritime resources and conflicts.

**Upholding the rule of law** is the main message the EU reiterates as it is the foundation of the international system.

The EU supports a binding **Code of Conduct** for the South China Sea between China and ASEAN based on the 2002 Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in
the South China Sea which already contains substantive provisions. The same applies to the principles laid down in the 1976 Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South East Asia, to which the EU is a signatory since 2012 – like China. It contains all the elements needed for inter-state behaviour and conflict resolution, including a specific dispute settlement mechanism. As a signatory to the Treaty the EU is fully entitled to take part in the discussions and to work towards upholding its principles such as settling disputes by peaceful means, through effective cooperation among parties and to renounce the threat or use of force.

In relation to Japan the finishing of the parallel negotiations of the FTA and SPA would provide a sound and long term basis for strengthened comprehensive bilateral cooperation. Although content shall prevail over speed, the conclusion would be the essential deliverable for the 2016 EU-Japan Summit. This would also enhance the strategic partnership, drive it to a higher level in adding deeds to words and translate the often professed shared values into concrete common policies or actions. The EU’s experience in overcoming the legacies of the past to improve political stability particularly among the three strategic partners of the EU (Japan, Republic of Korea, China) and in North East Asia in general could also be valorised in enhancing the strategic partnership.

Supporting trust and confidence building measures: The tri-lateral Japan-Korea-China cooperation as manifested through trilateral ministerials and summits is a useful starting point for trust building as is South Korea’s embryonic North East Asia Peace and Cooperation Initiative (NAPCI), which is itself very much modelled around the Helsinki process. The EU has taken up the invitation to engage in the NAPCI process, which could lead, according to South Korean diplomats to a ministerial meeting in a year’s time. In November 2015 the three years blockage was overcome and the trilateral summits, prepared by foreign ministers resumed, an essential trust building measure. The resumption of dialogue also lead to agreement between Japan and Korea to finally settle the
“comfort women” issue. Concerning the DPRK, the perspective for a restart of
the 6PT has to be maintained. The deal with Iran brokered by the EU on behalf of
the international community could serve as a source of inspiration and eventually
facilitate talks with the DPRK; in 2015 the EU has renewed its political consulta-
tions with the DPRK. However, another nuclear test and ballistic missiles launch
at the beginning of 2016 showed again the DPRK’s disrespect for UNSC resolu-
tion and deepen its isolation in the international community through a new wave
of UN-based sanctions.

The strategic partnership with India needs a re-launch: political impetus is
necessary to re-invigorate the existing framework of working groups and the FTA
negotiations – the EU is India’s largest trading partner. The overdue summit with
PM Modi held in March 2016 can serve this purpose as well as to extend the per-
ception of the EU beyond trade and economics e.g. including the security dimen-
sion, the Indian Ocean as well as climate change, energy, urbanisation, research
and development.

The Five Year Engagement Plan with Pakistan would profit from political mo-
momentum through high level contacts including the eventual holding of an ad hoc
summit. However, the dramatic increase in executions after the lifting of the
moratorium puts a strain on the relationship.

This applies unfortunately also to Indonesia which is of particular importance
for the EU, as a major player in ASEAN, a G20 member, as the largest Muslim
democracy with experience in handling Islamist challenges.

Nepal will continue receiving EU support for reconstruction after the terrible
earthquakes and for transition to a constitutional regime.

Supporting transition remains important in Afghanistan and in Myanmar, where
the EU has deployed an important election observation mission. Democracy
building remains an outstanding task. The treatment and status of the Rohingya
minority needs to be improved and solved to avoid the recurrence of boat people
in the region. The international Afghanistan conference hosted by the EU in October 2016 in Brussels shall assure continued support of the international community.

**Fostering multilateralism in Asia in boosting inter- and intra-regional cooperation drawing on the EU’s unique experience in regional integration** is an area where the EU has added value. The EU has already intensified considerably its cooperation with ASEAN, its longstanding dialogue partner. The first dedicated EU-ambassador to ASEAN took up his duty in September 2015. Turning the relationship into a strategic one, which would include a summit, as well as a region-to-region FTA remains on the agenda. 

The mentioned **Communication on ASEAN** provides a detailed work program and clarifies the EU’s position: The EU has a strong stake in the success of ASEAN integration and supports the implementation of the three Communities. With the adoption of the 2009 ASEAN Charter the Association has over the last years changed towards a more rule based approach to integration which could be the basis for building a rules-based Asian regional order which supports home-grown aspiration to democracy and human rights (Indonesia, Myanmar). The EU is the largest contributor to the costs of the ASEAN Secretariat. Supporting ASEAN’s Connectivity initiative in all its forms e.g. infrastructure, market opening and mobility of people through the lowering of barriers is an area where European experience is relevant. Once implemented this initiative could help to boost trade, investment and business in general, including the important SME sector. Support for a **greener economy** in implementing the results of the Paris Climate Change Conference is on the agenda as well as cooperation on political and security issues. This includes **human rights** where ASEAN seems prepared to make further steps after the adoption of its 2012 Human Rights Declaration: promoting human rights is an important first step which should lead to human rights protection. 

ASEAN is also the gatekeeper to the **East Asia Summit (EAS)**, which poten-
tially is the strategic forum on the rise in Asia. The EAS remains on the radar of
the EU, it seeks to contribute to the security and cooperation in Asia. The EU is
conscious of the efforts of the US to turn it into a leaders’ based security forum in
addition to the ARF on ministerial level. In the ARF the EU is present since the
beginning as EU, even predating the Lisbon Treaty. Thus, the EU joining the EAS
is a logical extension of its participation in the ARF and justified by the agendas,
which have a strong tilt towards non-traditional security issues. Similarly, the
ASEAN Defence Ministers Plus Meeting (ADMM+) oeuvres along the same
lines.
In fostering inter-regional integration, the EU as a co-founder has to make better
use of ASEM – the Milan summit is regarded as a successful event. The Novem-
ber 2015 ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting chaired by the HRVP in Luxembourg
was a good occasion to convey a strong message of commitment to inter-regional
cooperation and to make good use of the ASEM and its 20th anniversary summit
in July 2016 in Ulan Bator. Re-invigorating the economic pillar which played an
important role on the start-up phase, Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TIPAP),
Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP), Investment Experts Group (IEG),
could be an option, not least because of the attempted reinvigoration of the APEC
initiative. Given the size of ASEM which has grown since 1996 from 26 to 53
members with more candidates lined up, reflections on how to improve the man-
agement of the meeting are necessary without engaging in a permanent reform
discussion which would not serve the process.
Working with partners to assure that the many regional initiatives and FTAs do
not become an obstacle to free trade through a spaghetti bowl of rules of origins
but remain WTO compatible and assure an ‘open regionalism’ has become an
important task. At the same time these negotiations offer the possibility to par-
ticipate or even lead in norm and standard setting. This necessitates also close
cooperation with the US. TPP and TTIP are two bridges spanning the Pacific and
the Atlantic respectively which need a Europe-Asia connection. Now that the US President has been granted trade negotiating authority by the Congress and TPP negotiations are concluded, the TTIP negotiations could get the necessary boost. However, the sceptical public opinions primarily in Europe will then have to be won over.

The EU is an important source of *investment and technology* and wants to maintain this status; cooperation in the area of technology, research and development is highly placed on the agenda, not least from the angle of greening of economies and of assisting in green urbanisation projects. The Strategic Partnership in Science, Technology and Innovation concluded at the 2015 EU-Japan Summit is a good benchmark.

**Cooperation with the US** with the goal of sharpening the EU’s profile in bringing the complementarity of policies to the fore is another goal. The 2012 Clinton-Ashton Declaration provides a basis which could be better used. It is not a recipe for the US and the EU to gang up, but an open invitation to Asian partners to join in working towards peace and security (fighting transnational crime, terrorism, addressing cyber-security, regional disaster preparedness, crisis response capacity, anti-piracy…) sustainable development (eradication of poverty, Lower Mekong, Pacific Islands…) trade and economics.

Fostering *people-to-people* contacts, interaction among *civil societies* are goals not be omitted in this sketchy overview through promoting academic exchanges (Erasmus Plus, scholarship schemes for students, teachers and young professionals, Jean Monet Chairs and centres of excellence), value added tourism, twinning activities or more general increasing Asia literacy through promoting language training and translation of works of literature and not only science to increase cultural understanding. Significantly, the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) was set up as the only ASEM institution promoting this people-to-people dimension.

**In sum, maintaining a high level engagement with Asia:** HRVP has met the
South Korean, Japanese, Australian foreign ministers bilaterally, visited the Republic of Korea as the first Asian country, pursued the EU-China strategic dialogue in Beijing, participated in the EU-Japan Summit in Tokyo (May 2015) and with China (June 2015). In October 2015 the summit with ROK was held in Seoul, in March 2016 the summit with India in Brussels. She also delivered a speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2015 highlighting that the EU also has a military dimension although “our economic face is the one most Asians (and also most Europeans!) are more familiar with” and the EU’s readiness to enhance the partnership with Asia: “… while the EU continues to be deeply engaged IN Asia, we want to be more and more engaged WITH Asia, to address together our common challenges, and to take full advantage of our common opportunities.”

She also participated in the ARF Ministerial Meeting in Kuala Lumpur. The ASEM foreign ministers’ meeting chaired by the HRVP in Luxembourg in November 2015 offered another possibility of in-depth exchanges with Asian partners as well as for bilateral meetings with counterparts in the margin. The title of the Chair’s statement “Working Together for a Sustainable and Secure Future” conveys the message and lays out the tone for the 2016 20th anniversary ASEM Summit in Ulan Bator, titled “20 Years of ASEM: Partnership for the Future through Connectivity”

7) Conclusions
Geopolitics is more and more accompanied by geo-economics. Therefore it is useful to recall that economic strength remains the foundation of the EU’s influence based on which it developed a comprehensive approach to foreign policy. As the largest economy in the world on aggregate trade policy is crucial. The FTA with Singapore and the in particular the deep and comprehensive FTA with Korea triggered a development leading to FTA negotiations with Japan and negotiations on an investment agreement with China. The perspective for a region-to-region
FTA with ASEAN is maintained. The EU will work to ensure that the various bilateral, inter and intra-regional agreements do not collide with the multilateral trading system of the WTO. Engaging with the various Asian economies in terms of trade and investment, as well as offering market access to Europe carries considerable strategic value as diversification contributes to avoiding the development of Sino-centric economic system. ‘One Belt, One Road’ is a reference to Europe’s continuing attractiveness – China and Asian partners want to connect Asia to Europe, which is sign of strength and not of weakness, an opportunity for the EU to size.

The EU is undertaking a major public diplomacy campaign spearheaded by the EU delegations in the region; high level visits, summits and the mentioned initiatives to foster people-to-people activities and a pilot project in cultural diplomacy with China will help. The issue is not competition with member states, but working with member states to leverage influence in pooling scarce resources for a common cause.

The soft power of the EU remains as exemplified by culture, life-style, social model, attractiveness for tourism and immigration in the social field, its norm setting power albeit in competition with others.

In addition, the ‘European dream’ although completely different in nature pre-dates the ‘Chinese dream’ e.g. a Europe with a strong social system, European culture but also conscious of the environment, climate change to name just a few and therefore engaged in a comprehensive approach to policy making. Policy making based on cooperation, pooling of sovereignty and rule of law, not on alliance systems, is the European approach. Building a regional system of security and cooperation is a valuable European experience which can be a source of inspiration for Asia, especially for ASEAN and its ASEAN centred approach which the EU supports. ASEAN and ASEM provide the previously missing link between Asia and Europe. However, the yearlong crisis mode (Greece, financial
and political turbulences, refugee crisis, waning internal support) put the European problem solving capacity in jeopardy.

The successful operation ATALANTA demonstrates that soft power can be translated into **smart power** e.g. combining the soft and hard power. Showing and building on this nexus is of particular importance for the EU to develop into a fully recognised international actor, an actor which is not as a matter of principle shying away from the deployment of military and hard power. Freedoms of navigation and overflight remain key principle based on mutual interest. The presence of the EU in Asia is strong and multidimensional: first and foremost through investment of European companies and financial institutions in all Asian countries providing for jobs and technology; embassies, consulates, cultural institutes of Member States in addition to EU Delegations; military presence by the UK and France in the region; university campuses and academic personnel including exchange students; an huge number of cultural performances. Granting access to the market of half a billion consumers influences strongly the economic performance of all Asian countries. These elements grant influence which could be increased through better coordination and leveraging which in turn would lead to more cohesion.

All in all, the EU can bring **value added** to Asia – it has no hegemonic power intentions, no territorial claims. In the geopolitical world of Asia this ironically contributes to the difficulty for the EU to be recognised as a global player by Asian countries. However, stressing the rule of law, working to strengthen regional and global governance as well as multilateralism, developing the capacity to deal with non-traditional security threats, promoting conflict prevention, management and resolution are probably more needed in the region than more boots on the ground. These are also the issues at stake at the East Asia Summit to which the EU consequently can make a useful contribution.

This includes the **taking up of the challenges to the prevailing international**
order and system – they are not sacrosanct, they are open for change. The EU is an example for change – from 6 to 28. It was the driver for change in creating a European space of democracy and security as well as a driver for integration, not least to contain the recent centrifugal forces. Therefore it is not a status quo power but seeks change within the established rules. There are challenges to international law (maritime disputes), to the present order through the setting up of new institutions (BRICS New Development Bank, AIIB), through the promotion of state capitalism, to values (death penalty) and even statehood and borders (IS) to name just a few. This needs a principled, comprehensive policy which leverages the various strength of the EU, in particular trade and investment, development aid, technology development and transfer, know-how in regional integration and institution building to supply the important common goods of peace, security and predictability. These elements were crucial in overcoming the legacies of the past, not only after World War II but also in the reconfiguration of the Balkans. Leveraging these policies but also the strengths of individual member states, these are the elements which render the EU strong and turn it into an international force to count with. A few examples for illustration: Germany is of particular importance in the trade between the EU and Asia and especially China. France and the UK are permanent members of the UNSC and are also militarily present in Asia. Their security dialogues are of particular relevance. In addition there are always non-permanent European members in the UNSC. In the world of economics, taking on Google, like Microsoft before, is an example of a case where only the EU can challenge an international giant based on its competition law.

Taking up policies beyond trade and commerce has become a political necessity in the globalised and interconnected world and is part of the comprehensive approach of the EU which includes non-traditional security, development aid, technological cooperation, people-to-people contacts – trust and confidence building measures, overcoming the legacies of the past through integration and institution
building, living diversity and relying on cultures. Translating these assets into strengthened global governance is the challenge as demonstrated today by the up-heavals in the European neighbourhood and the tensions in Asia.

The EU needs to follow a focussed approach drawing on the one hand on the strength, experience and know-how of the EU and on the other hand taking up issues where transnational cooperation is essential to achieve results. Such an approach would lead to functional cooperation on a few important security issues with prime focus on (i) strengthening and participating in the developing regional architecture, (ii) upholding the rule of law – in particular in the South China Sea, (iii) assuring cyber security and (iv) connecting with Asia in making use of the EU’s experience in connecting Europe and of initiatives like “One Belt, One Road” in conjunction with ASEAN connectivity.

Such a focus will allow maintaining the momentum created since 2012. Thereby, doing less may be doing more, being consistent and coordinated doubles the weight; credibility is the currency which pays respect based on a plan of action designed to achieve the EU’s long-term goals in Asia.

To this end a narrative of cooperation and partnership, built on economic strength and political determination of a principled policy can turn the EU into a force to reckon with, as expected by many Asian partners, especially in an “Asian” century. Trade is politics; there is no trade policy without security a policy. Security has become indivisible geographically and inseparable from other policies. Thus, Europe is in Asia as Asia is in Europe and both need act accordingly, best in cooperation.

Dr. Michael Reiterer, Adjunct Professor for international politics (University of Innsbruck, part-time lecturer at University of Kobe) and Principal Advisor at the Asia-Pacific Department of the European External Action Service (EEAS), Brussels, contributes this paper in his personal capacity.

Contact: Michael.reiterer@uibk.ac.at
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