

# **Interregionalism as a Foreign Policy Tool of the EU: The Cases of ASEM and EU-ASEAN Partnership**

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## ABSTRACT

With the maturity of the EU as a regional and international actor, its role in the foreign policy relations has acquired an individual form. Over the last two decades, the EU has been using interregionalism as one of its foreign policy tools to conduct its external policies in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. This paper concentrates on the EU's interregional ties with Asia, examining the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process and the EU-ASEAN partnership. The primary question to be answered is whether interregionalism is a viable foreign policy tool to pursue the EU's external relations in Asia. Departing from this point, the paper argues that the success of the interregional relations is very much dependent on the level of integration of the counterpart regions involved in the process. Moreover, the paper demonstrates that the growing regional cohesion of the ASEAN as a regional organization has huge impact on overall success of the interregional EU-ASEAN partnership, while relatively low productivity of the ASEM could be best explained by the lack of cohesion among the Asian counterparts of the EU involved in the process.

*Key Words:* European Union, interregionalism, ASEAN, ASEM, regionalism

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## INTRODUCTION

During the early years of the European integration, the European Community (EC) was not such a relevant player in the international politics. Mostly concerned with the internal dynamics of the organization, the EC's external orientation was rather limited in its scope mainly to relations with former European colonies and in its content mainly to external trade. On the contrary, currently the EU has become extremely active in the international arena. Especially after the end of Cold War, not only did the cooperation and association agreements entered by the EU increased in quantity, "a range of conditionalities, including compliance with human rights and 'democratic governance' criteria, economic liberalization and privatization" have also become an inseparable part of the EU's cooperation with the rest of the world.<sup>1</sup> Hence, the EU is becoming an important global player attempting to spread its values and imposing its world vision over other global actors. As the intra-regional integration of the EU has been deepening with each passing decade, its external orientation is becoming stronger as well. Today, the EU's economic power, geographical size, and growing international image as an important global power are closely intertwined with the Union's prerogative to assert its weight in the international politics. This intention can be achieved through the development of coherent external policy and export of civilian-democratic values enshrined in the EU.

With the maturity of the EU as regional and international actor, its role in the foreign policy relations has acquired an individual form. Hettne and Söderbaum differentiate four tools, through which the EU pursues its external relations: 1) enlargement, which encompasses the

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<sup>1</sup> Bretherton, Charlotte and Vogler, John, 1999. *The European Union as a Global Actor*, London: Routledge, p.34

candidate countries (Turkey and Croatia) and potential candidates countries in the Balkans; 2) stabilization in the so-called European neighborhood, which encompasses post-Soviet countries from Europe and South Caucasus and the Mediterranean area; 3) bilateralism with great powers, such as the U.S. and Russia; 4) interregionalism with other regional organizations or groupings around the world.<sup>2</sup> Of particular interest is the fourth tool of EU foreign policy, which is based on region-to-region external policy conduct implemented with the help of the large number of interregional arrangements.<sup>3</sup> Interregionalism as foreign policy tool is largely attributed to the EU, as this regional organization is the major driving force behind the region-to-region relations taking place in the world. As Aggarwal and Fogarty put it, “[interregionalism is] primarily a strategy aimed at achieving gains the EU has been unable to reap through more traditional multilateral and bilateral channels... while bilateral or multilateral approaches may serve specific goals more efficiently, interregionalism has generally proven productive- or at least not counterproductive.”<sup>4</sup> Considering the above statement and the rising tide of interregionalism in the foreign policy agendas of regional organizations, the research conducted in this area contributes to our overall understanding of the significance of this foreign policy tool championed by the emerging global powers like the EU.

The primary purpose of this paper is to contribute to the literature on the EU’s role in interregionalism, which is emerging as a popular foreign policy model of global governance. The interregionalism is not a new concept in the EU’s foreign policy agenda. The early forms of interregionalism, labeled as “hub-and-spokes” networks (the EU-ASEAN and the EU-ACP), started drifting around Brussels by the end of the 1980s, when the EC was slowly

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<sup>2</sup> Hettne, Bjorn and Söderbaum, Fredrik, 2005. “Civilian Power of Soft Imperialism? The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism” in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.10, p.510

<sup>3</sup> *Idem*

<sup>4</sup> Aggarwal, Vinod and Fogarty, Edward, 2005. “The Limits of Interregionalism: The EU and North America” in *European Integration*, vol. 27/3, p.342

being viewed as an example and point of reference for other regional organizations established after the end of the Cold War.<sup>5</sup> These interregional cooperation forums were very limited in scope and activities, since the regional organizations participating in them had not yet developed the international actorness capabilities they possess today. Moreover, the asymmetry between the EU and its less developed interregional dialogue partners was very evident in the early years of interregionalism. However, as the interregional organizations developed overtime, the nature of interregional relations they entered took a different shape.

As Mathew Doidge states, “with the profound changes that have taken place in international system over the course of the past two decades, including most prominently the ending of bipolar conflict and the relative diminution of the role of states as a result of the twinned processes of economic globalization and the transnationalization of politics, regional organizations have proliferated and with them interregional relationships.”<sup>6</sup> Currently, we are witnessing the end of the hub-and-spokes system, as regional organizations such as the ASEAN and the Mercosur are paving the way for more balanced symmetric interregionalism.<sup>7</sup> Interregional partners of the EU such as the ASEAN are also becoming more integrated and developed, and therefore require rather comprehensive and equal treatment. Considering that the interregionalism is becoming a very popular foreign policy tool in the EU external relations, the issue deserves particular attention.

In order to analyze the interregionalism as a foreign policy tool of the EU, I have chosen the Union’s external relations with Asia. Besides the bilateral relations with individual Asian states, such as China, Japan, India, etc. the EU, to a large extent, conducts its foreign policy

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<sup>5</sup> Hanggi, Heiner, 2003. “Regionalism through interregionalism: East Asia and ASEM” in *Regionalism in East Asia: Paradigm Shifting?*, Liu, Fu-Kuo and Regnier, Phillipe, eds., London: Routledge Curzon, p.198

<sup>6</sup> Doidge, Mathew, 2007. “Joined at the Hip: Regionalism and Interregionalism” in *European Integration*, vol.29/2, p.230

<sup>7</sup> *Idem*

with Asian states through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process and the EU-ASEAN partnership. Both are interregional platforms encompassing the EU and great number of Asian states. My selection of these two case studies is strongly linked to the nature of these two interregional platforms in the emerging “world” of interregionalism. While the inauguration of the EU-ASEAN partnership in 1978 was “the real date of birth of the group-to-group dialogue”<sup>8</sup>, in which two pre-defined regional entities entered into interregional cooperation, the ASEM process is relatively young (since 1996) and evolves around the partnership between regionally integrated Europe on one side and collection of sixteen Asian states (see Chapter 2) that cannot be identified as regionally defined group on the other side. Nevertheless, the EU uses both forums as its foreign policy tool vis-à-vis various Asian states in multilateral basis.

Bearing this in mind, the primary research question of this paper is whether interregionalism is a viable foreign policy tool to pursue the EU’s external relations in Asia. While answering this question, it is important to recognize that “the shape of interregionalism, and the function it performs in the international relations, is dependent upon the nature of actors.”<sup>9</sup> Inspired by this, I put forth two main hypotheses for testing in this paper.

*Hypothesis 1: The more regionally integrated the EU’s counterpart regions are, the more fruitful is the interregional dialogue.* Here, the comparison between the cases of the EU-ASEAN partnership and the ASEM process is of crucial importance. Both cases have similar characteristics and the only study variable that is different is the level of integration of Asian states involved in the ASEM and the ASEAN. In the former the integration and group identity of the EU’s counterpart is practically absent, while the latter has a distinct regional

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<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, p.231

<sup>9</sup> *Idem*



cooperation form and identity of its own. Considering this, I will argue that the lack of integration among the Asian counterparts of the EU in the ASEM process, among other things, diminishes the importance of this interregional forum (see Chapter 2) in comparison with the EU-ASEAN partnership. Whereas, the EU's cooperation with the ASEAN is more effective, considering the deepening regional integration of this organization since the end of 1990s (See Chapter 3).

*Hypothesis 2: As the interregional relations with the EU progress, the regional cohesion of the under-integrated counterpart region grows stronger.* In order to test this hypothesis, I will mainly concentrate on the evolution of the ASEAN as a regional organization since the end 1990s (See Chapter 3) and the implications of this process on the overall EU-ASEAN partnership. The counterparts of the EU in the interregional dialogues also have the desire to transfer the cooperation on an equal footing from paper and rhetoric to the reality and in order to assure this, they have to improve their own regional cohesion and ability to act as a single bloc. Further integration of the counterpart regions also coincides with the EU's one of the main longstanding foreign policy goals in the world. This is the European intention to contribute to the promotion of regional integration processes taking place around the globe. European conviction that the promotion of regional integration processes across the globe is a viable option to create a stable and peaceful world is not a new phenomenon (see Chapter 1). Hence, the EU also contributes to the capacity building of the counterpart regions through interregional partnership. This was the case with the ASEAN, as it will be argued in the third chapter of this paper. This issue of promoting regional integration processes in the world is of huge importance for the foreign policy prerogatives of the EU.

Having analyzed the overall picture of the EU-ASEAN partnership and the ASEM process, I will be able to answer the question whether interregionalism is a viable foreign policy tool to pursue the EU's external relations in Asia. Moreover, comparing old (the EU-ASEAN partnership) and new (the ASEM process) forms of interregionalism; I will contribute to the mainstream literature on the interregionalism. In order to explore the above puzzle and conduct comprehensive research on it, I will employ various techniques ranging from critical review of books, articles, newspaper material to the analysis of the official EU, ASEAN, and ASEM documents and official statements. These documents could be considered as important qualitative sets of data available for measuring the success of interregional relations. On top of this, in order to provide the reader with full picture, I will compare and contrast the two case studies and argue how well these two interregional platforms suit the foreign policy goals of the EU.

In order to provide my line of reasoning in an efficient way, this research paper is comprised of three main chapters and a conclusion. In the first chapter, I will introduce the theoretical background for the paper. I will provide the reader with the main concepts and paradigms of interregionalism. The subsequent two chapters will be the case studies on the ASEM process and the EU-ASEAN partnership. In the second chapter, I will concentrate on the EU's diplomacy in Asia through the ASEM process. I will argue that the ASEM process has the potential of turning into a useful platform for dialogue and partnership, however is limited in scope and capacities due to several reasons highlighted in the second chapter. The third chapter will concentrate on the analysis of the EU-ASEAN partnership. In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate that this link of interregionalism between Europe and Asia is very promising, especially with the high probability of launching a free trade agreement (FTA), and may be viewed as an example for interregionalism processes taking place elsewhere

around the world. Finally, at the end of the paper, I will provide general conclusions based on the findings of this research.

## **CHAPTER 1**

### **Theoretical paradigm: Interregionalism in the EU foreign policy agenda**

The EU's external relations network has entered into a new phase since the signing of the Treaty of Maastricht in 1993 and subsequent development of Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The EU has slowly enriched the existing picture of international affairs, concentrating mainly in trade, aid, development, and regional integration. After the addition of the security dimension to the Union's common foreign policy, the EU strives to assert its weight in the global security concerns as well. Currently the EU pursues its foreign relations bilaterally vis-à-vis different states and multilaterally within the framework of international organizations, such as the World Trade Organization (WTO). However, during the last couple of decades and especially after the end of the Cold War some of these relations are conducted on region-to-region basis, which is popularly dubbed in the literature as "interregionalism". Interregionalism has become a foreign policy tool that the EU uses to build up its external relations with different regional organizations across the globe. In some cases, interregional partners of the EU are pre-defined regional organizations with distinct identities and operational mechanisms of their own (ASEAN, Mercosur). However, there are cases in which the counterparts regions are 'constructed' and labeled as a regional grouping (ACP countries), in order to be able to enter into a wider dialogue with the EU. Nevertheless, especially during the last two decades the EU has been widely using region-to-region approach for pursuing its relations in Africa, Latin America, and Asia.

The primary purpose of this chapter is to assess the importance of interregionalism in the EU's external policies. In order to measure this, I will briefly consider the rising popularity of interregionalism in the EU foreign policy agenda. Having considered the definition and main concepts of interregionalism, I will try to answer the question why the EU chooses this foreign policy approach for pursuing its diplomacy in Africa, Latin America, before concluding the chapter with the implications of interregionalism on the EU's external policies in the future.

### ***Defining interregionalism***

Before analyzing the weight of interregionalism in the EU foreign policy agenda, it is important to define the concept of interregionalism itself. At the same time, it is equally significant to note that interregionalism is a new and somewhat under-studied area in the contemporary research community. As Söderbaum and van Langenhove correctly note, since the respective research field is at its early stages of its development, the concept of interregionalism is still unclear and shifting.<sup>10</sup> Nevertheless, various scholars have attempted to attach a definition to interregionalism.

In their collection "Interregionalism and International Relations: A Stepping Stone to Global Governance", Hanggi *et al.* define interregionalism as "a process of widening and deepening political, economic, and societal interactions between international regions."<sup>11</sup> To put it differently, interregionalism encompasses the institutional crystallization of relations between the regionally integrated areas of the world, hence a relatively new phenomenon in the field

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<sup>10</sup> Söderbaum, Fredrik and van Langenhove, Luk, 2005. "Introduction: The EU as a Global Actor and the Role of Interregionalism" in *European Integration*, vol. 27/3, p.257

<sup>11</sup> Roloff, Ralf, 2006. "Interregionalism in theoretical perspective: state of the art" in *Interregionalism and International Relations: A Stepping Stone to Global Governance*, Hanggi *et al.* eds., New York: Routledge, p.18

of international relations. Julie Gilson describes interregionalism as a “double regional project, responding to the need to pool an even greater percentage of resources in recognition of other interregional and global dynamics.”<sup>12</sup> Approaching the concept from the constructivist point of view, she notes that interregionalism contributes to the further development of regional (self) identities through the interaction with (other) region(s), which has a distinct identity of its own.<sup>13</sup> Hence, interregionalism promotes regional integration processes across the globe and could be viewed as a new tool for the conduction of external relations in the modern age of globalization. Bearing this in mind, we can claim that the success and fruitfulness of interregional cooperation is directly linked to the level of integration and coherence of counterpart regions.

Today the EU is the most developed example of regional integration processes that sprout around quickly after end of World War II. The evolution of the EU has also been accompanied with the change in classical conduct of state-to-state foreign relations. The development of interregionalism is laying the ground for the maturity of “actorness” of the regions, which can bring about the transformation of Westphalian world order. Here, by “actorness” I mean the capability of regions “to develop presence... aggregate interests, formulate goals and policies, make and implement decisions.”<sup>14</sup> Hence, more regional coherence results in more fruitful interregional cooperation. In sum, interregionalism can simply be defined as region-to-region conduction of foreign relations and if we consider the current pace of globalization, this phenomenon deserves a particular attention.

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<sup>12</sup> Gilson, Julie, 2005. “New Interregionalism? The EU and East Asia” in *European Integration*, vol. 27/3, p.309

<sup>13</sup> *Idem*

<sup>14</sup> Ruland, Jurgen cited in Söderbaum, Fredrik and van Langenhove, Luk, *op.cit.*, p.259

## ***Beyond Westphalia: Is interregionalism a new step towards a different global order?***

The Treaty of Westphalia (1648) is considered to be the cornerstone of modern-day state-to-state conduct of international relations. With this treaty came the birth of the nation-state and Westphalian world order in which these nation-states are responsible, among other things, for the internal welfare and external relations of their pre-defined territorial entities. A solid and intensive pattern of international relations were built and managed by these states, since they are considered to be the ultimate international legal entities capable of entering into bi- and multilateral agreements with other states similar to them.

Currently, many scholars agree that this Westphalian nation-state is still “the main constitutive element of the modern international political system.”<sup>15</sup> However, it is an undeniable fact that the old-fashioned Westphalian world order is being challenged by the raising tide of globalization. European integration process, which was accelerated in response to globalization, “binds the nation state into a cooperative framework and facilitates the pooling of sovereignty to enhance effectiveness in the new globalized environment.”<sup>16</sup> International and regional organizations are also becoming constitutive elements of the international political system. And more importantly, they are gaining weight in the conduction of international relations, which is the primary concern of this paper. Thus, the study of interregionalism is of great importance considering that the world is welcoming the conduct of affairs, such as regional integration and interregionalism that are unorthodox to the Westphalian system.

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<sup>15</sup> *Ibid*, p.253

<sup>16</sup> Reiterer, Michael, 2006. “Interregionalism as a New Diplomatic Tool: The EU and East Asia” in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, vol.11, p.224

## ***European regional integration and interregionalism***

As mentioned above, the regional integration and interregionalism are closely interrelated. In order to maintain successful interregional relations, counterpart regions should be capable of developing the qualities of global “actorness”. As Jurgen Ruland correctly points out, interregionalism is driven as much with globalization as with the development of regionalism itself.<sup>17</sup> This idea is further deepened by Söderbaum and van Langenhove, who claim that “although interregionalism should be seen as a distinct phenomenon, it cannot be understood in total isolation from regionalism.”<sup>18</sup> In the view of these authors, we are currently witnessing the “third-generation regionalism”, which is distinguished from its predecessors with stronger external orientation [concentration] of regions” towards international organizations, other regions and individual states.<sup>19</sup>

The success of the European integration process has demonstrated to the world that the best possible way of overcoming ancient hatreds and fostering stable economic and social growth could be achieved through the development of regional integration. After the ratification of the Treaty of Lisbon (to be completed before 1 January, 2009), the EU’s global “actorness” will reach its highest level with the establishment of a post of permanent President of the European Council, creation of a new double-hatted position, High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, and formation of an EU diplomatic service - External Action Service.<sup>20</sup> This will increase the level of external orientation of the EU tremendously.

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<sup>17</sup> Ruland, Jurgen, 2002. *Interregionalism in International Relations*, Conference Summary Paper, p.2 available at: <[www.politik.uni-freiburg.de/pdf/InterregSum.pdf](http://www.politik.uni-freiburg.de/pdf/InterregSum.pdf)>

<sup>18</sup> Söderbaum, Fredrik and van Langenhove, Luk, *op.cit.*, p.254

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid*, pp.256-257

<sup>20</sup> Treaty of Lisbon amending the Treaty on European Union and the Treaty establishing the European Community, 2007, available at:<<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cg00014.en07.pdf>>



The success of the EU has also inspired other regional integration processes around the globe and as Michael Reiterer puts it, “for better or worse, the EU model has become the yardstick to measure regionalism and consequently interregionalism [elsewhere].”<sup>21</sup> European integration model has become the ultimate point of example for the post-Westphalia oriented regions (such as the ASEAN). Hence, having reached the highest existing degree of regional integration as such, the EU is and will be more externally oriented, with the purpose of shaping the global governance in a new way. And the ultimate foreign policy tool for shaping the post-Westphalian world order is the extensive use of interregionalism. As Mathew Doidge claims, interregionalism operates in two directions: “upward to the global multilateral level (an external focus) and, to the extent that the regional dialogue partners themselves are involved, downward to the regional level (an internal focus).”<sup>22</sup> Hence, interregionalism evolves around two major concepts challenging Westphalian world order, namely regionalism and globalization. The extensive use of interregionalism is also favored by the European Commission and liberal-supranational oriented European diplomats, who believe that a new world order is at our doorsteps. In 2001, then Belgian Prime Minister and President of the European Council, Guy Verhofstadt publicly stated that “... we need to create a forum where the leading continental partnerships can all speak on an equal footing: the European Union, the African Union, the Common Market of the South (Mercosur), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (the ASEAN), the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), etc.”<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Reiterer, Michael, *op.cit.*, p.224

<sup>22</sup> Doidge, Mathew, *op.cit.*, p.231

<sup>23</sup> Verhofstadt, Guy, 2001. “The Paradox of Anti-Globalization” in *The Guardian*

## ***Why the EU chooses interregionalism?***

As argued above, interregionalism is slowly becoming a popular foreign policy tool in the EU external policy circles. Here the question to be answered is why the EU chooses interregionalism as one of its foreign policy tools? The reason behind this popularity is twofold.

Firstly, interregionalism has a tremendous impact on regional integration. In order to be able to conduct effective interregional relations, counterpart regions must be able to project their regional identity and coherence from within throughout the interaction process with each other. To achieve this, harmonization of the foreign policy prerogatives and the establishment of multilateral trust among the states forming the regional organization(s) are essential. The impact of regional integration and interregionalism on each other, in this case, goes both ways. Just the simple fact that currently the EU is the major driving force behind the interregional partnerships across the globe is an indicator of the high level regional integration in Europe. Thus, through fostering interregionalism Europe contributes to the development of regionalism around the globe. The reason for this, as Söderbaum *et al.* put it, is the firm European conviction that the “regional integration can enhance, peace, prevent conflict and promote cross-border problem-solving and the better use and management of natural resources.”<sup>24</sup> However, the European model of integration, as such, “cannot be a blueprint”<sup>25</sup> for other regional integration processes elsewhere. The level of historical enmity, of amity, social differences, varying level of economic development of states forming a

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<sup>24</sup> Söderbaum *et al.*, 2005. “The EU as a Global Actor and the Dynamics of Interregionalism: a Comparative Analysis” in *European Integration*, vol. 27/3, p.370

<sup>25</sup> Zepter, Bernhard, 2008. “Reflections on regionalization in Europe: lessons for Asia?” in *Asia Europe Journal*, vol.5, p.463

particular region, etc. must also be taken into account. The idea of blindly following the European integration model is not feasible.

Secondly, interregionalism not only contributes to the development of regionalism, but also “legitimizes” regions as global actors in the international relations. By promoting interregionalism, the EU enhances its own international recognition and acceptance.<sup>26</sup> The participation of the EU in the interregional forums and intergovernmental organizations under a single flag with other regional organizations of the very same kind thus could be seen as a huge detachment from Westphalian world order, as argued above. Interregional dialogues and partnerships are strong indicators proving that external policies can be conducted on the supranational level as well. It demonstrates that regional organizations are capable of developing global actorhood capabilities for conducting international affairs.

### ***Glancing at the EU supported interregionalism***

As mentioned above, interregionalism has become an integral part of the EU’s foreign relations with Africa, Latin America, and Asia. At this point, in order to provide the reader with the broader picture, I would like to briefly touch upon the EU’s interregional partnerships with Africa and Latin America. The relations with Asia, as a case study, will be thoroughly analyzed in the following two chapters.

To begin with, as Söderbaum *et al.* correctly point out, “interregionalism is particularly strong in the EU’s external policies towards Latin America, where the EU has interregional partnerships with the most relevant sub-regions, such as the Andean region, Central America

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<sup>26</sup> Söderbaum *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p.372

and, above all, Mercosur.”<sup>27</sup> The EU’s strongest interregional cooperation in Latin America is with the Mercosur. The history of the EU-Mercosur relations date back to 1991, when the two sides concluded the Treaty of Asuncion, which laid the ground for the establishment of Mercosur (Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay and Uruguay) itself.<sup>28</sup> The scope of relations has been further broadened with the signing of the EU-Mercosur Interregional Framework for Cooperation Agreement (EMIFCA) in Madrid in 1995.<sup>29</sup> According to this agreement, which is the major document shaping the interregional relations between the two sides, the relations between the two regions are based on three pillars: political dialogue, social-cultural cooperation (including learning from the EU regional integration experience, cooperation against organized crime, and partnership in the field of information and communication technologies), and economic and commercial cooperation.<sup>30</sup>

At the same time, in order to be able to enter into agreement with the EU, Mercosur gained international legal status. Hence, the EU contributed to the “legitimization” of this regional organization, which brings us back to the issue of “legitimization” of regional actors emphasized above. On 2 September 2005, at the occasion of an EU-Mercosur trade negotiators meeting at ministerial level, Ministers met to discuss the feasibility of concluding the EU-Mercosur Association Agreement, which will also include the free trade agreement between the two regions.<sup>31</sup> However this has not yet been accomplished.

While the EU-Mercosur partnership is comparatively new, the EU’s interregional relations with Africa within the Africa-Caribbean-Pacific (ACP) group of countries framework is

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<sup>27</sup> *Ibid*, p.366

<sup>28</sup> Santander, Sebastian, 2005. “The European Partnership with Mercosur: a Relationship Based on Strategic and Neo-liberal Principles” in *European Integration*, vol. 27/3, p.289

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, p.290

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, p.294

<sup>31</sup> See EU web page on External relations with Mercosur available at:  
<[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/mercosur/intro/](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/mercosur/intro/)>

probably one of the oldest existing interregional relations in the history.<sup>32</sup> Generally, the EU's cooperation with the ACP group of countries is a very distinct form of interregionalism. Mary Farrell calls this interregionalism "as an innovative form of interregional cooperation, a form of hybrid interregionalism between the formal regional grouping of the European Union and a 'constructed' region comprising African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries."<sup>33</sup> In this partnership, the counterparts of Europe cooperate with the EU only, whereas integration among the African, Caribbean, and Pacific countries is absent. Hence, in this form of interregionalism the EU stands in the center, while countries that make up African, Pacific, and Caribbean regions remain in the periphery without any integration among each other.<sup>34</sup> Nevertheless, huge attention within this hybrid interregional cooperation is allocated to the African countries, considering the intensity of historical European ties to this continent.

As Mary Farrell puts it, "nowadays, these relations are conducted under the auspices of the Cotonou Agreement, signed in 2000, and the successor to the series of Lome Agreements that spanned the period from 1975 to the eventual agreement on a new framework."<sup>35</sup> As a much stronger side in the interregional relations with Africa, the EU is pressing the African states for the promotion of democracy and human rights and imposing political conditionality for the continuation of bilateral trade between the two continents.<sup>36</sup> A special attention is given to the development of regional and sub-regional integration processes in Africa, such as the South African Development Community (SADC) and more importantly African Union (AU).<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Söderbaum *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p.367

<sup>33</sup> Farrell, Mary, 2005. "A Triumph of Realism over Idealism? Cooperation Between the European Union and Africa" in *European Integration*, vol. 27/3, p.263

<sup>34</sup> Thanks to Peter Balazs for emphasizing this point

<sup>35</sup> Farrell, Mary, *op.cit.*, p.263

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid*, pp.267-271

<sup>37</sup> Söderbaum *et al.*, *op.cit.*, p.367

### ***Interregionalism and the EU foreign policy: what implications for the future?***

In this chapter, I have demonstrated that interregionalism is an important pillar of the EU's foreign policy. Through this policy, the EU promotes the regional integration processes around the globe and, at the same time, "legitimizes" its own existence as an international actor. In a way, interregionalism can also be viewed as the Union's tool to contribute to the development of solid regional organizations like the EU in the world. As mentioned above, interregionalism is extremely popular in the supranationalist circles and the more powers are delegated to the EU from the member states, the stronger interregional ties will get. Besides, interregionalism is another step away from the Westphalian style of conducting international politics and relations. If this line of argument is correct, then interregionalism will become a very strong diplomatic tool while we disengage from the Westphalian world order.

Interregionalism also contributes to the promotion of the European regional integration as well. It should facilitate the formation of a "single European voice" in the external policy issues vis-à-vis other regions. As argued above, with the help of interregionalism the EU, among other things, is also playing a role in the promotion of regional integration processes in Asia, Latin America, and Africa. Meanwhile, the success of interregionalism is also closely linked to the integration level of the counterpart regions. As we all know, currently the EU is the pinnacle of the regional integration processes that are taking place in the world. On the other hand, counterpart regions are not even close to reaching the level of integration that we are witnessing in Europe. This issue and the overall success of interregionalism in the EU diplomacy will be analyzed in detail in the following two chapters, as I will scrutinize the EU's external policies in Asia.

## CHAPTER 2

### Asia-Europe Meeting: A Grand European Diplomacy in Asia?

For centuries different parts of Asia have attracted European missionary, trading, and colonial powers. Today the EU does not only perceive the Asian, and mainly South East Asian countries as set of potential trade partners, but considers the region of great geo-strategic importance in the globalizing world.<sup>38</sup> Besides the bilateral relations with individual Asian countries, the EU pursues its diplomacy in Asia through regional approach. On this respect, three interregional platforms are discernable: the EU-ASEAN partnership, the EU-South Asia Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) partnership, and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process.<sup>39</sup> The largest institutional framework to structure the partnership and dialogue between the twenty-seven EU member states, the European Commission and Asian countries, which include ten ASEAN countries, the ASEAN Secretariat, India and Pakistan from the SAARC, as well as China, Japan, Mongolia, and South Korea, is provided through the ASEM process. It is an interregional association with no formal binding powers, which provides a framework for political, economic, and cultural cooperation and exchange over the cross-cutting issues between these two regions.<sup>40</sup>

In this chapter, I will assess the importance of the ASEM as one of the products of the EU diplomacy. The question to be answered is how successful is the ASEM as an interregional partnership between the EU and its Asian counterparts. While answering this question, it is

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<sup>38</sup> Xuewu, Gu ed., 2002. "Europe and Asia Mutual Perceptions and Expectations on the Way to a new Partnership in the Twenty-First Century", *ZEI Discussion Paper*, p.99

<sup>39</sup> Gilson, Julie, *op.cit.*, pp.310-314

<sup>40</sup> Oudjanai, Radhia, 2004. "EU-Asia Relations" in *European Foreign Policy, From Rhetoric to Reality?*, Mahncke *et al.* eds., Peter Lang Pub Inc., p.344-345

important to keep in mind that despite the numerous pledges of commitment towards Asia and abundance of documents supporting bilateral and interregional cooperation, the EU in general retains less interest in the developing Asian countries. Throughout the chapter, I will try to demonstrate that this “lack of interest” may cause future problems for the EU considering the region’s growing economic and political weight in the global arena. At the same time, I will argue that the lack of intra-regional integration among the Asian counterparts of the EU is an important factor negatively influencing this interregional partnership.

In order to find an answer to the above question, firstly, I will introduce the two camps, which are divided in their view of the ASEM’s level of success. After this, I will consider the arguments put forth by various scholars who identify themselves with these camps. In the final part of the chapter, I will provide my own remarks based on the critical review of the existing literature and institutional mechanisms of the ASEM with respect to common position formulation and its overall weight in the EU’s diplomacy in Asia, before providing general conclusions.

### ***Review of the selected literature on the ASEM***

ASEM framework was established in 1996 with the primary purpose of further development of the relations between the EU and the East Asian region. The ASEM Summits, which are the high-level meetings within the framework, bring together the heads of states and governments of the EU and its Asian counterparts “taking place every two years, alternately in Asia and Europe... [Summits] are the most important feature of the ASEM process,



providing the main political impetus.”<sup>41</sup> The EU’s main incentive for supporting the ASEM could be explained by the European desire to counterbalance the American and, in general, great Asian (Russia, China, and Japan) influence in the region.<sup>42</sup> Hence, this interregional diplomacy vector has the potential to contribute to the multilateralism and further deepen the growing complex interdependence in the globalizing world. Moreover, many still view ASEM as an important institution in “interregional community-building”<sup>43</sup>, since it brings together the world’s largest and most populous regions. Considering this, the EU should capitalize from this cooperation on larger scale for challenging the US hegemonic unilateralism through the promotion of interregional partnership.

Despite the fact that it has been functioning only for twelve years (1996-2008), the scholars are divided in two different camps in their views about the effectiveness of the ASEM in the mainstream and dynamics of Europe-Asia relations. For some scholars such as Dent, Jurgen, and Yeo the ASEM is under-institutionalized and suffers from the lack of binding powers over its creators, hence on the way to turning into a ‘pleasant’ platform for inter-organizational exchange, but nothing more.<sup>44</sup> Highlighting the above indicated problematic nature of the ASEM, Yeo Lay Hwee notes the absence of concrete results and abundance of political rhetoric after the conclusion of each Asia Europe summit.<sup>45</sup> Logically, these scholars stress the importance of ‘formalizing’ the ASEM and delegation of supranational binding powers to the institution, in order to ensure its survival and increase its effectiveness in the

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<sup>41</sup> See European Commission web page on External Relations, ASEM available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/asem/asem\\_summits/index\\_sum.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/asem_summits/index_sum.htm)

<sup>42</sup> Dent, Christopher, 2004. “The Asia-Europe Meeting and Inter-Regionalism” in *Asian Survey*, vol.44:2, p.215

<sup>43</sup> *Idem*

<sup>44</sup> Eckhardt, Jappe, 2005. “Dynamics of East Asian Regionalism, what implications for the EU?”, van der Geest and Kundu eds., Working Paper, European Institute for Asian Studies, p.2

<sup>45</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2000. “ASEM: Looking back, Looking forward” in *Contemporary South East Asia*, vol. 22/1, p. 113-144

future. According to this camp, it is in the EU's rational interests as a global political actor to attach more assertive meaning to this institution.

In contrast, considering the wide agenda of the ASEM, which stretches from politics to trade, from environment to culture, some scholars, such as Lim and Reiterer, challenge this notion of under-institutionalization, concentrating more on the cemented channels of interaction and abundance of joint ventures, and initiatives.<sup>46</sup> Generally, scholars who identify themselves with this camp are very optimistic about the future of the institution. As Michael Reiterer puts it, "from the very beginnings ASEM participants had strong, if admittedly European interests" in political, and further on economic and social areas of cooperation.<sup>47</sup> Developing this idea, Reiterer considers the ASEM process as the EU's contribution to shaping a new system of global governance and a huge step in the future perspectives of the just world order.<sup>48</sup> The final strong argument of this pragmatist camp is the huge number of states (currently the ASEM brings together forty-three states, twenty-seven EU member states and sixteen Asian states), which are brought together and interact with each other through ASEM.<sup>49</sup>

Both camps have their strong and weak arguments about the future of the ASEM as can be deducted from the above identified hypotheses specific for each side. However, I think the arguments put forth by the pessimist camp describe the ASEM better than the pragmatist camp. The abundance of meetings and initiatives undertaken between the EU and Asian states through the ASEM platform has been mistakenly identified as a sign of progress and

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<sup>46</sup> Lim, Paul, 1999. "The Unfolding Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Process: Issues for ASEM III", Briefing Papers, European Institute for Asian Studies, p.1-17

<sup>47</sup> Reiterer, Michael, 2002. *Asia-Europe: Do they meet? Reflections of the Asia-Europe Meeting*, Singapore: Asia Europe Foundation p.38-40

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid*, p.206

<sup>49</sup> Pereira, Rui, 2007. "The Helsinki Summit and the future course of Asia-Europe Meeting" in *Asia Europe Journal*, vol.5/1, p.17

institutional maturity.<sup>50</sup> I think in order for the accomplishment of the EU's incentives to deepen multilateralism in the world and counterbalance the U.S. in the region through the ASEM, the organization must produce binding decisions. As mentioned above, so far this has not been the case. At the same time, the absence of binding and formal institutional decisions, which serves the interests of both sides, justifies the unwillingness of relatively poor Asian states to invest more into the institutional capacity building and further deepening of the ASEM. If the ASEM meetings do not produce obligations and binding decisions, they do not seem to validate the time spent and associated expenditures. Talking for the sake of talking does not strengthen the institutional capacity of the ASEM, which is not in the interests of the EU diplomacy. Moreover, the intra-regional integration among the Asian countries that hold the ASEM membership is absent. This makes it very difficult for these countries to act as a single bloc and naturally, negatively affects the overall fruitfulness of interregional negotiations. Therefore, the productivity of this interregional platform is closely linked to the level of intra-regional integration of the Asian members. If the Asian states manage to consolidate their regional integration and act as a single bloc, then we may speak of interregional cooperation on an equal region-to-region basis.

Meanwhile, the ASEM also suffers from the absence of a Secretariat, which could play an important role in the agenda-setting, planning, and coordinating the activities of the institution.<sup>51</sup> The establishment of such kind of Secretariat would serve to strengthen the ASEM as an institution and facilitate the development of common objectives, values, and to a lesser extent identity. Formalizing ASEM may also facilitate reaching common positions among the participants, which will be discussed in detail below.

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<sup>50</sup> Ruland, Jurgen, 2006. "Interregionalism and the Crisis of Multilateralism: How to keep the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Relevant" in *European Foreign Affairs Review*, 11, p.59

<sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p.61

## ***The EU and Asian states and the impossibility of reaching a common position***

One of the arguments put forth by the pragmatist camp about the successfulness of the ASEM is that the institution contributes to the development of just world order through augmenting multilateralism. Christopher Dent claims that “interregional frameworks like the ASEM are... obliged to demonstrate their buttressing of multilateral institutions... when certain aspects of multilateral order are under threat from aggressive hegemonic unilateralism or ‘blocist’ regionalism, both of which can bring significant instability to the global system.”<sup>52</sup> In order to maintain and strengthen this multilateral stability, the interregional organizations like the ASEM can function as “rational interfacing mechanisms between regional and multilateral orders.”<sup>53</sup> This means that the EU and Asian members of the ASEM have the potential to develop common positions on overarching issues such as international terrorism, environmental degradation, energy security etc. in the biennial ASEM summits and later dovetail these common positions into global-multilateral frameworks such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the United Nations General Assembly (UN GA). Obviously the existence of such an opportunity was also understood by the leaders of both sides and the importance of common position formulation before the important meetings and summits within multilateral frameworks was emphasized in numerous high-level ASEM meetings. Most recently, as stated at the Eighth ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting held in Hamburg on 28-29 May 2007:

“Ministers held fruitful discussions on a broad range of issues of common interest: Global issues such as energy and climate change energy and climate change, counter terrorism, non-proliferation, world trade and the United Nations; international issues such as Afghanistan, Iran, Iraq, the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East; recent developments in Asia and Europe. They noted with satisfaction the common ground of ASEM-partners in numerous fields and agreed to continue to make utmost use of the ASEM dialogue and cooperation, being a

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<sup>52</sup> Dent, Christopher, *op.cit.*, p.220

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid*, p.221

unique, practical, flexible and comprehensive platform for the Asia-Europe partnership in view of finding joint responses to global challenges.”<sup>54</sup>

It is undeniable that the ASEM provides both regions with this possibility. Even back at the Third ASEM Foreign Ministers’ Meeting in 2001, both the EU and Asian sides agreed to meet before the UN GA and WTO gatherings in order to consult and try to find common positions in such international organizations.<sup>55</sup> However, as far as the evidence suggests these consultations will not be driven by strong desires to reach common positions. For example, the EU’s strong conviction about the participation of civil society groups in the WTO decision making processes is not likely to be supported by certain ASEM members, such as China and Singapore, who do not share the European liberal-democratic values. On the other hand, Atlanticist bloc inside the EU is unlikely to support any ASEM initiatives undermining the American power in Asia. All these above factors negatively impact the productivity of this interregional platform.

Another important obstacle for the formation of common positions in the ASEM is the increasing number of its members, which currently encompasses forty-three states. It is an undisputed fact that the EU member states sometimes have difficulties in formulating common positions in the Council of Ministers. Iraq campaign and most recently diverging foreign policy prerogatives over the recognition of Kosovar independence are prime examples of this. Considering this, the prospects of forty-three different nation-states with varying ideologies and identities to come to a common ASEM position seems very far from reality. I think for the development of the ASEM as a serious interregional institution more profound mechanism controlling the eligibility and future membership prospects of the applicant countries should be designed. Milder version of the EU’s own conditionality

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<sup>54</sup> See Chair Statement Eighth Asia Europe Meeting, ASEM - Foreign Ministers’ Meeting, Hamburg 28-29 May 2007 available at: <[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/asem/min\\_other\\_meeting/for\\_min8.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/min_other_meeting/for_min8.pdf)>

<sup>55</sup> Dent, Christopher, *op.cit.*, p.235

principle could be an example. In order to prevent the organization from widening and concentrate more on deepening, moratorium for the admission of new members could also be implemented as a solution to this issue.<sup>56</sup> Meanwhile, it is impossible to think of a common Asian identity. Regional integration process among the Asian members of the ASEM is absent. More or less, the European side has some experience in the formation of common external policies. However, their Asian counterparts belong to different sub-regional organizations (for example, ASEAN and SAARC) or have no memberships in any regional organizations in Asia (for example, Mongolia). Hence, the formation of a common position among the Asian states becomes problematic. The milder version of the same problem also exists within the EU.

Besides the fact that the EU is having difficulties in the achievement of common positions, it also has yet to accomplish its longstanding foreign policy goals in the region as well. One of the prime examples of this is the EU's competition with the U.S. over the ASEAN markets. Currently the EU lags behind the US in external trade turnover with the ASEAN countries. Moreover, the year of 2010 will mark the beginning of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) "free trade and investment zone" decade, which is considered to be one of the important successes of the US diplomacy in the region.<sup>57</sup> Meanwhile the EU has still yet to persuade the ASEAN to sign a free trade agreement (FTA). Activities on this direction were launched in 2005, when Commissioner Peter Mandelson and the ASEAN Economic Ministers set-up a "Vision Group" to conduct feasibility study.<sup>58</sup> Commenting on the EU-ASEAN FTA, Mandelson noted that "strengthening the commitment and focus of EU trade policy in Asia is important part of the EU's global trade strategy... and an EU-ASEAN FTA

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<sup>56</sup> Ruland, Jurgan, 2006, *op.cit.*, p.61

<sup>57</sup> Dent, Christopher, *op.cit.*, p.230

<sup>58</sup> See European Commission web page on External Trade available at:  
<[http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index_en.htm)>

is a key part of that.”<sup>59</sup> This is a strong indicator that the EU is attaching more interest to the region and points to the growing weight of the ASEAN in particular and Asia in general in the European diplomatic agenda. If the EU manages to enter into FTA with the ASEAN, as a stronger side, the European companies will reel in high profits. The EU has yet to reach this goal. Even if the EU manages to secure FTA with the ASEAN countries, it will not be the product of the European and Southeast Asian leaders’ fruitful meetings at the ASEM. Most likely it would be considered as the success of the EC-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee.

### ***The EU diplomacy in Asia: what use of the ASEM?***

Having analyzed the arguments put forth by each camp, it is unfortunately true that the pessimists offer more plausible arguments towards our understanding of the process. However, just the mere fact that the EU has been able to bring together important global players like China, Japan, Indian, the ASEAN countries under a single roof could be viewed as a step forward.

It is true that so far the EU has been unable to fully utilize the potential of the institution to pursue its policies in Asia and contribute to the further development of multilateralism in the world. In order to keep the ASEM relevant and functioning several major initiatives, as suggested above, have to be taken. As Yeo Lay Hwee notes, disinterest in the ASEM exists especially in the “higher echelons of European diplomacy” occupied with the Balkans, Iraq, and other pressing issues at hand.<sup>60</sup> This disinterest also negatively affects the commitment of small and medium power Asian states towards the institution and they in return, turn to other

<sup>59</sup> Mandelson cited in the web page of EC delegation to Singapore available at: [http://www.delsgp.ec.europa.eu/en/eu\\_in\\_asia/eu\\_asean.htm](http://www.delsgp.ec.europa.eu/en/eu_in_asia/eu_asean.htm)

<sup>60</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2002. *The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Process: From Sexy Summit to Strong Partnership?*, Copenhagen: Danish Institute for International Affairs, p.102

interregional organizations such as the APEC forum or prefer the cooperation with regional superpowers such as China, Russia, and Japan. This negatively impacts the EU's diplomacy and interests in the region. Considering the above points, I think it is high time for the EU to attach more attention to the Asian continent as whole and to do so it may begin by strengthening the ASEM.

### ***Conclusive remarks on the current state of the ASEM***

Considering that the ASEM suffers from the lack of binding supranational powers over its members and absence of a common institutional Secretariat, faces major challenges in reaching a common position, and is prone to irrational enlargement accompanied with low and sometimes no intra-regional integration in Asia, I think it is fair to claim that as an institution the ASEM is still in the process of maturing. In the long run, ASEM is supposed to play a decisive role in the formation of a common European foreign and security towards Asia. However, as I have illustrated above this common policy towards Asia, as a whole, is yet to be achieved. Firstly, the EU in some cases naturally has difficulty acting as a single unit. Member states often pursue competing and sometimes contradictory foreign policies. Secondly, the ASEM contributes very little towards the development of multilateralism, since achieving a common position is highly problematic. Thirdly, the expectations on the side of Asian states about the role the EU could play in maintaining peace and stability in the region is diminishing considering the low productivity of the ASEM. Finally, the success of the ASEM is also linked to the level of regional integration in Asia, which currently is in a loose form. The Asian counterparts of the EU in the ASEM are lagging far behind the European states in the level of integration. This lack of regional integration among the Asian counterparts of the EU diminishes the overall success of the ASEM process. Considering all



of these if I could answer the question posed by Yeo Lay Hwee in the title of her book *The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Process: from Sexy Summit to Strong Partnership?*, I would say that unfortunately the ASEM still remains a summit that brings together colorful diversities of Asia and Europe and whether it will play an important role in the future for the EU foreign policy is difficult to speculate. Nevertheless, the process can be considered as a complimentary tool for the EU's bilateral relations with different Asian states and interregional partnerships with the ASEAN and the SAARC. And it is quite possible that this interregional cooperation with the EU may further promote the sub-regional and, to a greater extent, regional cohesion of the Asian states involved in the ASEM.

## CHAPTER 3

### Tightening the Grasp of Interregionalism: EU-ASEAN Partnership

As argued in the above the chapter, interregionalism as one of the diplomacy tools of the EU in Asia has yet to prove itself through the ASEM process. One of the reasons behind this is the absence of regional integration among the Asian counterparts of the EU involved in the ASEM process. Is this argument plausible enough to claim that the interregionalism would work if the EU's counterpart was a similar regional organization? The primary purpose of this chapter is to find an answer to this question. Another important issue addressed in this chapter is the impact of interregionalism on the integration of the counterpart regions. In this chapter, I will try to demonstrate that the ASEAN's interregional partnership with the EU has also had impact on the promotion of the regional cohesion in Southeast Asia. This process is popularly termed in the literature as "regionalism through interregionalism".<sup>61</sup>

In order to do so, as a second case study, I will analyze the interregional relations between the EU and the ASEAN. Considering that the ASEAN countries also participate in the ASEM process, are Asian states, and have established a regional organization of their own, they provide an appropriate case study for the research intentions of this chapter. Firstly, I will look at the historical perspectives of the evolution of the ASEAN as a regional organization throughout the history of the EU-ASEAN partnership. Then I will try to assess the degree of successfulness of this partnership analyzing the official documents, since the signing of the EEC-ASEAN Cooperation Agreement in 1980.<sup>62</sup> Of crucial importance for the consideration

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<sup>61</sup> See for example Doidge, Mathew, *op.cit.*, pp.229-248 and Hanggi, Heiner, *op.cit.*, pp.197-219

<sup>62</sup> See ASEAN-EEC Joint Declaration, Kuala Lumpur, 7 March 1980 available at:  
<<http://www.aseansec.org/1500.htm>>

of successfulness of the EU-ASEAN partnership is the analysis of the possibility of launching an FTA between the two regions. Finally, the analysis of the EU-ASEAN relations will be adequate when I draw final conclusions about the success of interregionalism in the EU external policies.

### ***“ASEAN way” of regionalism***

The ASEAN was established on 8 August 1967 in Bangkok, Thailand with the intention of five original member states- Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand- to bring peace and stability to the region. Brunei joined the organization in 1984, Vietnam in 1995, and Lao People’s Democratic Republic and Myanmar (Burma) in 1997. The last country whose membership application was approved by the ASEAN was Cambodia (1999).<sup>63</sup> As stated in the Bangkok Declaration establishing the ASEAN, the primary objectives of the organization are:

“(1) to accelerate economic growth, social progress and cultural development in the region and (2) to promote regional peace and stability through abiding respect for justice and the rule of law in the relationship among countries in the region and adherence to the principles of the United Nations Charter.”<sup>64</sup>

Hence, the primary purpose of the ASEAN, in the words of Yeo Lay Hwee, “was, and is, to turn a region [Southeast Asia] in turmoil and instability into a region of peace and tranquility. It was to be an instrument for managing and containing intra-regional conflicts, and in so doing maintain and strengthen national sovereignty.”<sup>65</sup> However, as contended by Joergen

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<sup>63</sup> See the Overview of Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) available at: <http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm>

<sup>64</sup> <http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm>

<sup>65</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007. “The Inter-Regional Dimension of EU-Asia Relations: EU-ASEAN and the Asia-Europe Meeting Process”, p.4. (Manuscript received from the author)

Moeller, unlike the EU, which enjoys quite large degree of independence from its creators as a supranational body, “ASEAN is... [an] organization within the limits it has set for itself of which the most important is its character as an intergovernmental organization...”<sup>66</sup>

Generally, the ASEAN states prefer regionalism based on non-interference from outside powers like the EU, the U.S., Japan and China, promotion of the economic growth, and respect for the internal diversity of the political systems of member states.<sup>67</sup> Cooperation within the ASEAN is based on, what Yoshimatsu Hidetaka lists as, “informality, consensus-building, incrementalism, pragmatism, and others.”<sup>68</sup> This high level of informality-driven regional integration path is popularly dubbed in the literature as the “ASEAN way” of regionalism.<sup>69</sup> Yoshimatsu Hidetaka defines the informality within the ASEAN as “*ad hoc* consensual decision-making through flexible consultation rather than institutionalized and structured procedures based on legalistic and contractual paradigms.”<sup>70</sup> The “ASEAN way” of regionalism was the primary point of reference of the Southeast Asian countries for almost thirty years following the establishment of the organization.

### ***Beyond the “ASEAN way” of regionalism***

However, as demonstrated above in the case of the ASEM, the absence of formality may decrease the responsibility, predictability, and overall seriousness and prestige of the organization. Informality is only a useful tactic during the early stages of the partnership

<sup>66</sup> Moeller, Joergen, 2007. “ASEAN’s Relations with the European Union: Obstacles and Opportunities” in *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, vol.29/3, p.480

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid*, pp.471-74

<sup>68</sup> Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, 2005. “Political Leadership, Informality, and Regional Integration in East Asia: The Evolution of ASEAN Plus Three” in *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol.4/2, p.208

<sup>69</sup> Acharya, Amitav, 1997. “Ideas, Identity and Institution-Building: From the ‘ASEAN Way’ to the ‘Asia-Pacific Way’?” in *Pacific Review*, vol.10/2, pp.328-330

<sup>70</sup> Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, *op.cit.*, p.208

negotiations, because it enables the formation of amiable discussion environments, since the parties have no official commitments and expectations from each other.<sup>71</sup> Yet, as the time goes by and formal settings are still absent, the organizations have a tendency of turning into “talk-shops”. This was realized by the ASEAN leaders as well. The first step in the direction of developing institutional settings was taken on 28 January 1992, when the ASEAN heads of state and governments agreed to set up ASEAN Free Trade Area (AFTA) according to the Framework Agreements on Enhancing ASEAN Economic Cooperation.<sup>72</sup>

The impotence of the ASEAN’s informality was further proven when the region fell into the grasp of financial crisis that swept across the Southeast Asia towards the end of 1990s. ASEAN fell short of putting together a common policy to ease the outcomes of this financial crisis.<sup>73</sup> As Yoshimatsu Hidetaka puts it, “the dysfunction of the existing regional institutions stimulated the development of a new regional cooperation initiative in the late 1990s: the nesting of East Asian states.”<sup>74</sup> As can be seen from the above sentence, the Asian financial crisis laid down the ground for further integration of the ASEAN and paved the way for stronger cooperation of this organization with its Northeast Asian neighbors, namely China, Japan, and South Korea. The ASEAN leaders came to realize that loose intergovernmental cooperation fails to eliminate the challenges of globalization.

Following the Asian financial crisis, then Malaysian Foreign Minister Syed Hamid Albar stated that “I believe Southeast Asia will need to forge even stronger bonds with countries of Northeast Asia...As underscored by the Asian Financial Crisis, the destiny of Southeast

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<sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, pp.209-210

<sup>72</sup> See Framework Agreements on Enhancing ASEAN Economic Cooperation available at: <http://www.aseansec.org/12374.htm>

<sup>73</sup> Ruland, Jurgen, 2000. “ASEAN and the Asian Crisis: Theoretical Implications and Practical Consequences for Southeast Asian Regionalism” in *Pacific Review*, vol.13/3, pp.425-30

<sup>74</sup> Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, *op.cit.*, p.212

Asian countries is inextricably linked to its Northeast Asian neighbors.”<sup>75</sup> The first official meeting among the heads of states and governments of the ASEAN countries and China, Japan, and South Korea was held in 1997 to celebrate the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of the ASEAN and to find a solution to the crisis.<sup>76</sup> This marked the beginning of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) framework, which evolves around the cooperation of the ASEAN and three Northeast Asian states -China, Japan, and South Korea.

Yeo Lay Hwee calls the three-year period of 1997-2000, as the period of the ASEAN’s quest for “soul searching”.<sup>77</sup> To support this Yoshimatsu Hidetaka claims that “the policy makers in East Asian states including the ASEAN members gradually put stress on formality, by introducing new formal institutions and rules as well as progressing organizational systems of the existing institutions for regional cooperation.”<sup>78</sup> Establishment of formality within the ASEAN was against the core principle of the organization and the “ASEAN way” of regionalism, which evolves around loose intergovernmental cooperation. Nevertheless, in order to prevent the organization from falling apart as a useless platform of dialogue, “formalization” was a necessary step that had to be taken.

Shortly after the crisis, the ASEAN countries began “a process to exchange financial information and review with increasing level of openness”<sup>79</sup> by setting up the ASEAN Surveillance Process (ASP). Through this institution, periodical monitoring of global economic and financial developments as well as exchange of economic data among the ASEAN countries was launched.<sup>80</sup> Moreover, at the Thirty-seventh ASEAN Ministerial

<sup>75</sup> Addressed at the Intan, Kuala Lumpur, 12 August 1999, cited in Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, *op.cit.*, p.215

<sup>76</sup> *Ibid*, p.216

<sup>77</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.10

<sup>78</sup> Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, *op.cit.*, p.212

<sup>79</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.10

<sup>80</sup> Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, *op.cit.*, p.220-21

Meeting (AMM) in 2004, heads of the states and governments of the APT welcomed the establishment of the APT Secretariat within the ASEAN Secretariat in order to develop the organizational mechanism of the framework.<sup>81</sup> The seriousness of the ASEAN leaders about the formalization of the organization was once again proven in 2003. At the ASEAN Summit in Bali in 2003, member states agreed “to work towards a community with three pillars- the ASEAN Security Community; the ASEAN Economic Community, and the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community.”<sup>82</sup> The establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community will open up the way for establishing the single market of Southeast Asian states. In line with the establishment of the ASEAN Community, in 2005 the ASEAN leaders have commissioned the Eminent Persons Group (EPG) to draft the first ever ASEAN Charter.<sup>83</sup>

From the above initiatives of the ASEAN leaders, we can see that the Association is en route to turning into more formalized and institutionalized organization. Besides the internal desire of the member states to transfer more powers to the ASEAN, the interregional cooperation with the EU also stimulated the ASEAN countries to attach more value to this regional organization. The situation is well illustrated by Mathew Doidge in his article “Joined at the Hip”.

“... [T]he failure to achieve cooperation has been attributed by both Union and Association officials to the weakness of ASEAN as a regional actor. Union officials have criticized ASEAN as not being an ‘interesting partner’, a hurdle that could be overcome were they to offer the support of ‘a real bloc, ten countries really of the same opinion’. ASEAN officials, too, acknowledge this failing, noting that

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<sup>81</sup> See Joint Communiqué of the Thirty-seventh ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Jakarta, 29-30 June 2004 available at: <<http://www.aseansec.org/16192.htm>>

<sup>82</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.11

<sup>83</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.12

ASEAN's weak negotiating capacities constitute one of the main obstacles to convergence of policies with the EU”<sup>84</sup>

Hence, the reforms undertaken by the ASEAN is highly welcomed and supported by the EU as well. At the Sixteenth EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting in Nuremberg in 2007, the institution building within the ASEAN was highly encouraged by the EU side. One of the provisions of the Nuremberg Declaration reads as following:

“[The EU and ASEAN hereby] Cooperate to strengthen ASEAN capacity and institution building processes that will contribute to achieving the goal of the ASEAN Community consisting of ASEAN Security Community (ASC), ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) through, among other steps, exchange of information and experience between the EU and ASEAN on community building.”<sup>85</sup>

This extensive support from the EU to the capacity building process of the ASEAN does not only remain on the paper. The EU's contribution to the promotion of regional integration of the ASEAN is carried out with the help of its ASEAN Programme for Regional Integration Support (APRIS). Through this program, the ASEAN Secretariat is granted access to the technical assistance from their European counterparts.<sup>86</sup> As argued in the first chapter, the success of the interregional dimension of the EU's relations with the ASEAN is heavily dependent on the success of regional integration process of the ASEAN itself. Hence, the EU's support to the intraregional development of the ASEAN is not surprising. Considering this, I can hypothesize that as the interregional relations with the EU progress, the regional cohesion of the ASEAN as a counterpart region grows stronger. Cooperation with the EU

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<sup>84</sup> Doidge, Mathew, *op.cit.*, p.238

<sup>85</sup> See Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership available at: [http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download\\_docs/Maerz/0314-RAA2/0315NurembergDeclaration.pdf](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download_docs/Maerz/0314-RAA2/0315NurembergDeclaration.pdf)

<sup>86</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007, *op.cit.*, p.12



affects the development of the ASEAN directly through projects like the APRIS and official EU support and indirectly through the ASEAN's moral obligation and desire of trying to be a worthy and equal partner. At the same time, this increases the international actorness capabilities of the ASEAN.

### ***Short history of the EU-ASEAN relations***

The EU is one of the oldest partners of the ASEAN. The EU's partnership with the ASEAN dates back to 1978 and "institutionally the main vehicle for consultation and cooperation has been the ASEAN-EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM), which is scheduled to meet at least every two years with the foreign ministers of the ASEAN and the EU in attendance."<sup>87</sup> The main document governing the relations between the EU and the ASEAN is the Cooperation Agreement of 1980, which encompasses all twenty-seven EU member states and nine of the ASEAN countries, but the EU side has noted that the agreement cannot be extended to Myanmar because of the latter country's rather poor indicators with regards to democracy and human rights.<sup>88</sup> The cooperation between the EU and ASEAN has not been marked with any important improvements throughout the 1980s and early 90s. The reason behind this was twofold. Firstly, as argued above, the ASEAN countries wanted to limit the foreign interference in their regional affairs and viewed the partnership with the EU as useful platform for dialogue, consultation, and exchange of information. The "ASEAN way" dominated the external policies of the organization as well. Secondly, the EU itself retained less interest in the region, as the ASEAN countries had not reached their current level of development during this period of time. However, currently with a total population of 512

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<sup>87</sup> Moeller, Joergen, *op.cit.*, p.470

<sup>88</sup> See European Commission web page on External Relations, ASEAN available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/asean/intro/index.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asean/intro/index.htm)

million and a combined gross domestic product (GDP) of USD 737 billion, and an average per capita income of \$1,266 (ranging from \$310 in Cambodia, through \$4,198 in Malaysia, to \$20,987 in Singapore), the ASEAN provides a very large market for the EU's external trade intentions.<sup>89</sup> In 2007, the EU's share in the ASEAN's external trade constituted 11.5 per cent.<sup>90</sup>

Moreover, the establishment of the ASEM (1996), Asian financial crisis (1997-98), and the decision of the ASEAN about the accession of Myanmar to the organization (1997) has marked a new era in this interregional partnership. The meetings between the EU and their counterparts intensified after the establishment of the ASEM, which was initiated in 1996 by Singapore's then Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong.<sup>91</sup> Importantly enough, the first informal meeting of the APT leaders also took place with regards to the preparation to the first ASEM meeting in 1996, where the APT "was recognized as a distinct geographical and economic entity."<sup>92</sup> Hereby, one of the successes of the ASEM process could be its contribution to the development of the APT, or East Asian regionalism.

Moreover, during the 1997 financial crisis, the EU member states proposed considerable financial assistance to help the ASEAN countries recover from the shock.<sup>93</sup> As demonstrated above, the EU also supports the further economic cooperation and establishment of the AFTA, in order to eliminate possible financial obstacles for the Southeast Asian region.

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<sup>89</sup> See European Commission web page on External Relations, ASEAN available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/asia/reg/sea.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asia/reg/sea.htm)

<sup>90</sup> Lindberg, Lena and Alvstam, Claes. "EU-ASEAN trade: Interregional FTA Negotiations in the Pipeline", Paper presented at the 10<sup>th</sup> Annual Conference on European Integration, SNEE, Molle, May 20-23 2008, p.7 available at:

<http://www.snee.org/filer/papers/469.pdf>

<sup>91</sup> Moeller, Joergen, *op.cit.*, p.476

<sup>92</sup> Hidetaka, Yoshimatsu, *op.cit.*, p.216

<sup>93</sup> Moeller, Joergen, *op.cit.*, p.474

Finally, the most problematic issue in the EU-ASEAN relations is the case of Myanmar. As Joergen Moeller notes, “in March 1997 the EU suspended Myanmar from receiving any benefits under the General System of Preferences (GSP) scheme, strengthened sanctions against the regime in October, and, at the end of the year, refused to participate in the EU-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting if Myanmar was present on an equal footing.”<sup>94</sup> In 1999, in accordance with the EU sanctions against Myanmar, Germany refused to issue a visa for Burmese Foreign Minister to attend the AEMM, scheduled to take place in Berlin.<sup>95</sup> On top of this, as Magnus Petersson noted “a great image problem faces ASEAN this year [2006] when Myanmar could take the chairmanship for ASEAN.”<sup>96</sup> This was avoided, as under pressure from the ASEAN member countries, Myanmar announced that it would not take up the chairmanship of ASEAN in 2006. This was announced right after the Thirty-eighth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) that took place on 26 July 2005 in Vientiane:

“We have been informed by our colleague, Foreign Minister U Nyan Win of Myanmar that the Government of Myanmar had decided to relinquish its turn to be the Chair of ASEAN in 2006 because it would want to focus its attention on the ongoing national reconciliation and democratization process. Our colleague from Myanmar has explained to us that 2006 will be a critical year and that the Government of Myanmar wants to give its full attention to the process... We also express our sincere appreciation to the Government of Myanmar for not allowing its national preoccupation to affect ASEAN’s solidarity and cohesiveness.”<sup>97</sup>

However, the issue of Myanmar did not underestimate the overall cooperation between the EU and ASEAN. At the Thirty-ninth AMM that took place on 25 July 2006 in Kuala Lumpur, the ASEAN leaders also expressed their concern about the condition of human

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<sup>94</sup> *Ibid*, p.475

<sup>95</sup> *Idem*

<sup>96</sup> Petersson, Magnus, 2006. “Myanmar in EU-ASEAN Relations” in *Asia Europe Journal*, vol.4/4, p.578

<sup>97</sup> See Joint Communiqué of the Thirty-eighth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Vientiane, 26 July 2005 available at: <<http://www.aseansec.org/17592.htm>>

rights and democracy in Myanmar and called for the release of political prisoners.<sup>98</sup> For better or worse, both the EU and then ASEAN realized that jeopardizing the interregional relations between the two sides over Myanmar was not feasible. This is not to claim that the EU has put the issue of poor human rights and democracy record of Myanmar aside. On the contrary, both the EU and the ASEAN are committed to the solution of the problem. A lot also depends on the ASEAN, as the organization is trying to promote not only economic development, but also the democratic image of the region in the world.

### ***Looking ahead: The EU's new partnership with the Southeast Asia***

As argued above, the EU's relations with the ASEAN have been developing since the end of the 1990s. In line with this, in 2003, the European Commission adopted a Communication on a "New Partnership with South East Asia", further fostering its interregional ties with the ASEAN. New partnership with the ASEAN is set to evolve around six major issues<sup>99</sup>:

- Supporting regional stability and fight against terrorism;
- Promotion of human rights, democratic principles, and good governance;
- Mainstreaming Justice and Home Affairs;
- Injecting a new dynamism into regional trade and investment relations;
- Supporting the development of less prosperous countries;
- Intensifying the dialogue in specific policy areas, such as climate change, transport, energy, culture, education, and information society.

<sup>98</sup> See Joint Communiqué of the Thirty-ninth ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Kuala Lumpur, 25 July 2006 available at: <<http://www.aseansec.org/18561.htm>>

<sup>99</sup> See Communication from the Commission on a "New Partnership with South-East Asia", 2003, available at: <[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/library/publications/09\\_sea\\_en.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/library/publications/09_sea_en.pdf)>

As can be seen, the EU is attaching more importance to its partnership with the Southeast Asian countries recently. Most of this has to do with the ASEAN's strong desire to increase its credibility in the world. Since the EU is interested in the promotion of regional integration processes across the globe, the ASEAN's initiatives are welcomed by the EU. In accordance with this, on 5 June 2007, the European Commission allocated 7.2 million euros through its APRIS II program to assist the development of the regional integration of ASEAN.<sup>100</sup> Moreover, the EU has also intensified its efforts for the conclusion of an FTA with the ASEAN. As indicated in the second chapter, the EU's negligence in this direction could be seen as of the strategic miscalculations in its external policies. As Aggarwal and Koo put it, "given the high degree of economic interdependence between the two regions, with East Asia being the second most important market for EU exports after North America and its leading partner for imports, it is hardly surprising that free trade talks have begun to solidify between the two economic power-houses."<sup>101</sup> In October 2006, the Commission issued the Communication on "Global Europe, Competing in the World", in which the ASEAN that also constitutes an integral part of East Asia was identified as one of the key future FTA partners.<sup>102</sup> On 23 April 2007, the Council authorized the Commission to start negotiating an FTA with the ASEAN.<sup>103</sup>

At the EU-ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) Consultations held in Brunei Darussalam on 4 May 2007, EU Trade Commissioner Peter Mandelson and ASEAN Economic Ministers

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<sup>100</sup> See ASEAN Secretariat Press Release, Jakarta, 5 June 2007, available at: <http://www.aseansec.org/20649.htm>

<sup>101</sup> Aggarwal, Vinod and Koo, Min Gyo, 2005. "The evolution of APEC and ASEM: Implications of the New East Asian Bilateralism" in *European Journal of East Asian Studies*, vol.4/2, p.245

<sup>102</sup> See European Commission web page on external trade available at: [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index_en.htm)

<sup>103</sup> [http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index_en.htm)

launched the FTA negotiations.<sup>104</sup> As Malaysian National News Agency (Bernama) reports, “independent research commissioned by the EC suggested that the likely economic benefits for both ASEAN and the EU from an EU-ASEAN FTA were considerable. ASEAN could see its exports to the EU rise by 18.5 percent and expect economic gains equivalent to 2.0 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP) by 2020, according to the studies.”<sup>105</sup> The signing of an FTA with the ASEAN could be considered as one of the prime accomplishments of this interregional partnership. Not only will the FTA affect the bilateral trade relations between the two sides, it will also have tremendous impact on the regional integration process of the ASEAN as well. Though an FTA does not necessarily mean monetary integration, it may assist the ASEAN countries towards some sort of currency cooperation and augment their economic integration in the future.<sup>106</sup>

Overall, the EU’s interregional cooperation with the ASEAN has been quite successful since the end of 1990s. The driving reason behind this could be Southeast Asian countries detachment from the “ASEAN way” of regionalism and external cooperation, which was based on informality and non-intervention. The ASEAN’s concentration on deepening its integration has had tremendous affect on outward orientation of the organization as well. Shift from the “ASEAN way” has also been spotted and supported by the EU, which contributes to the fruitfulness of the interregional relations. Approval of the “New Partnership with South East Asia” by the Council in 2004 and optimistic environment in the EU about the possible conclusion of an FTA, signal the growing importance the EU attaches to its interregional ties with the ASEAN.

<sup>104</sup> <[http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index_en.htm)>

<sup>105</sup> Tengku Noor Shamsiah Tengku Abdullah, 2008. “Flexible Approach to Drive European Union-ASEAN FTA Negotiations” in *Bernama online*, available at: <[http://web6.bernama.com/bernama/v3/news\\_business.php?id=331775](http://web6.bernama.com/bernama/v3/news_business.php?id=331775)>

<sup>106</sup> Moeller, Joergen, *op.cit.*, p.476

## CONCLUSION

As intra-regional cohesion of the regions grows stronger, naturally, their external orientations improve. Moreover, regional organizations develop new foreign policy tools such as interregionalism, in order to be able to relate themselves to other similar regions. As argued in the first chapter of this paper, interregionalism and regionalism are intertwined concepts and the development of one contributes to the development of the other. For instance, increased regional integration leads to the formation of more coherent foreign policy doctrine within the regional organizations and this, in turn, affect the success of interregional relations. When the regional integration is low or absent, the productivity of the interregionalism decreases. As argued in the second chapter of this paper, the low productivity of the ASEM process is closely linked to the low level of the intra-regional integration of Asian partners of the EU involved in this dialogue. At the same time, regional organizations like the EU use interregionalism as foreign policy tool to promote the regional integration around the globe. As argued in the third chapter of this paper, the EU assists the regional integration process of the ASEAN through special projects. On top of this, overtime under-integrated counterpart regional organizations like the ASEAN tend to consolidate in order to become a true equal partner of the EU in the interregional relations. Hence, the interregionalism contributes to the evolution of international actorhood capabilities of the regional organizations.

One of the main arguments of this paper was that the interregionalism also increases the legitimacy of regions as international actors. As argued in the paper, interregional dialogues and partnerships are strong indicators proving that external policies can be conducted on the supranational level as well. It demonstrates that regional organizations are capable of

developing global actorness capabilities for conducting international affairs. Hence, interregionalism legitimizes the existence of regional organizations as international actors.

So is interregionalism a viable foreign policy tool for the EU to pursue its external relations with Asia? The answer is yes. Both interregional dialogues- the ASEM process and the EU-ASEAN partnership- are inseparable parts of the EU's diplomacy with the Asian states. Firstly, the ASEM process is the youngest, therefore comparatively weaker link of the EU's interregional ties with Asia. However, the overall process is important for both sides. For the EU side, the ASEM process could be viewed as a complimentary platform augmenting the Union's bilateral relations with the Asian powers such as Japan, China, India, etc. On the other hand, for the Asian side, the ASEM process could be of great value for the evolution of stronger Asian integration and possibly common identity through interaction with Europe. As argued in the paper, the level of intra-regional integration of the Asian states involved in the ASEM process may prove decisive for the overall role of the institution in the interregional relations between Europe and Asia.

Secondly, in case of the interregional relations with the ASEAN, Yeo Lay Hwee is correct when she states that "the pace and quality of the truly interregional or group-to-group dialogue between EU and ASEAN will depend much on the capacity and political will of ASEAN to deepen its integration."<sup>107</sup> As claimed in the paper, the ASEAN has been maturing as a regional organization since the end of 1990s and the EU's contribution to this process is evident. Both regional organizations are interested in the further development of interregional relations and therefore, the future perspectives for more fruitful cooperation is very promising. Considering the reassuring possibility of launching an FTA between the two

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<sup>107</sup> Yeo, Lay Hwee, 2007. *Op.cit.*, p.17



regions, the interregional ties between the two of the world's leading regional organizations is likely to grow even stronger. At the end of the day, the interregionalism is an important foreign policy tool for the EU and both the ASEM process and the EU-ASEAN partnership will constitute an important integral part of the EU's foreign policy towards Asia in the future.

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<[http://ec.europa.eu/external\\_relations/mercosur/intro/](http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/mercosur/intro/)>;
- European Commission web page on External Trade available at:  
<[http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/trade/issues/bilateral/regions/asean/index_en.htm)>;
- European Commission delegation web page to Singapore available at:  
<[http://www.delsgp.ec.europa.eu/en/eu\\_in\\_asia/eu\\_asean.htm](http://www.delsgp.ec.europa.eu/en/eu_in_asia/eu_asean.htm)>;
- Framework Agreements on Enhancing ASEAN Economic Cooperation available at:  
<<http://www.aseansec.org/12374.htm>>;
- Joint Communiqué of the Thirty-seventh ASEAN Ministerial Meeting, Jakarta, 29-30 June 2004 available at: <<http://www.aseansec.org/16192.htm>>;
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<[http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download\\_docs/Maerz/0314RAA2/0315NurembergDeclaration.pdf](http://www.eu2007.de/en/News/download_docs/Maerz/0314RAA2/0315NurembergDeclaration.pdf)>;
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<<http://www.aseansec.org/64.htm>>;
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<<http://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/cg00014.en07.pdf>>.