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***Regional Identity Formation in Southeast Asia  
and the Role of the European Union***

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Introduction	4
1. Regional Integration and Identity Building in Southeast Asia	5
1.1. Regional Integration in Southeast Asia and the Role of ASEAN	5
1.2. ASEAN as a Regional Organization and the Challenges of a Common Identity	6
2. The European Union and its Engagement with Southeast Asia	7
2.1. The EU's Policy towards Southeast Asia	7
2.2. The Role of the ASEM as a Channel of Dialogue and Interaction between the EU and ASEAN	9
3. Evaluating the EU's Policy for the Promotion of a Regional Identity in Southeast Asia	10
Conclusion	12
References	14

## *Introduction \**

The dynamics of globalization have had a tremendous influence in the fields of international relations and politics. More particularly, since the 1960s a widespread use of this theory has been obvious in social sciences and in economics. In these terms, globalization should be seen as a bidirectional process that has an impact both at the international and the regional level of governance. As Dudley points out “globalization... is not an overriding, one-way phenomenon by which “the local” is made into a part of “the global”; rather, in each local context aspects of the global are selectively appropriated, rejected and modified, and ultimately fed back into a global space”.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, from a realist perspective, the states, which are the major actors in the international system decided to respond to this challenge by promoting the idea of regional integration.

The phenomenon of regionalism is perfectly illustrated in the cases of the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). These two entities are two examples of regional integration. According to Hemmer and Katzenstein “regional groupings and regional effects are of growing importance in world politics. Although often described in geographical terms, regions are political creations and not fixed by geography. Even regions that seem most natural and inalterable are products of political construction and subject to reconstruction attempts”.<sup>2</sup> However, integration has been different in these two organizations. The different political, social, historical and economic backgrounds of Europe and Southeast Asia have played a crucial role in the integration process that has been taking place in these two regions.

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<sup>1</sup> Dudley, Sandra (2002), ‘Local Identities and Global Flows of Objects and Images’. *Oxford Development Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 2, p. 168.

<sup>2</sup> Hemmer, Christopher and Katzenstein, Peter J. (2002), ‘Why is There No NATO in Asia? Collective Identity, Regionalism, and the Origins of Multilateralism’. *International Organization*, Vol. 56, No. 3, p. 575.

In this context, the EU-ASEAN relations offer an excellent example for examining the framework of interaction between these two regional organizations. This becomes even more intriguing, if Mahbubani's argument is taken into consideration. He supports that "by definition, East-West partnerships will be harder to create and sustain because of cultural differences. Here the good news is that some East-West partnerships are taking off".<sup>3</sup> European and Southeast Asian relations can be seen as such a case.

Therefore, this paper in its limited space, will try to examine the interaction between the EU and ASEAN. More specifically, it will focus on the EU's attempt to promote the concept of regional identity in Southeast Asia. In the first part, the phenomenon of regional integration in Southeast Asia will be examined and the role of ASEAN as a regional organization will be further analysed. Secondly, the EU's strategy to promote and achieve political interaction will be assessed and the role of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), as a channel of dialogue between the two regions will be examined. Last but not least, in the third section the EU's policy towards Southeast Asia will be critically evaluated in relation to the so called 'different cultural and political background' of these two regions.

Finally, the above related findings will lead to a conclusion that will attempt to provide an answer to the main research focus of this paper, which deals with the extent to which the EU can promote its own perception of regional identity in a region that is supposed to be dominated by a 'different' hierarchy of values.

## *1. Regional Integration and Identity Building in Southeast Asia*

### **1.1. Regional Integration in Southeast Asia and the Role of ASEAN**

The 20<sup>th</sup> century was negatively stigmatized by the effects of the two World Wars and the Cold War. The West was a crucial actor in the global setting at that time. The response of Europe was the promotion of regional integration and cooperation that resulted in the creation of the European Community. Asia could not stay inactive in the new global order and the challenges that arose. As a result, ASEAN was founded in 1967. ASEAN's founding members saw their attempt as a way of strengthening Southeast Asia's position in the region of Asia-Pacific. Furthermore, they wanted to reduce the possibility of experiencing the negative outcomes of a tension between the United States of America and the Soviet Union. Such an attempt can find strong reasoning in the theory of neorealism.

However, liberal institutionalism and institutional constructivism can provide further insights in the creation of ASEAN's 'puzzle' and the implication that it has in the region of Southeast Asia. It is obvious that ASEAN can be seen as an evidence for the rise of regionalism in Southeast Asia, a fact that has resulted not

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<sup>3</sup> Mahbubani, Kishore (2008), *The New Asian Hemisphere: The Irresistible Shift of Global Power to the East*, Public Affairs, New York, p. 264.

only in regional changes but in the different approach that the rest of the international 'players' have adopted. A clear example has been the strategy that the EU has pursued towards the region so far. At this point, it would be useful to refer briefly to ASEAN's history and its further development in order to highlight its important role. This will enable us to understand the challenges that it had to face not only as an international but as a regional actor as well.

In August 1967 Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore and Thailand, took the decision to establish ASEAN. It was evident that "the governments demonstrated a favourable disposition towards an American predominance of power in the region and a suspicion on Soviet motives and activities".<sup>4</sup> Moreover, ASEAN moved further and "we may argue that ASEAN, or the process of integration of Southeast Asia in general, has advanced as a combination of three actors: coalition building *vis-à-vis* common threat perception and extra-regional powers, soft institution building, and an emerging regional identity".<sup>5</sup> Such an argument gains further weight if we have in mind that Cambodia, Laos, Burma, Brunei and Vietnam decided also to become members of ASEAN. In that sense, cooperation and further integration in the region found its track.

Finally, the ASEAN Regional Forum in 1993, the agreement on the establishment of an ASEAN Free Trade Area in 1993, which came into force in 2002 and the ASEAN plus Three in 1999, can be considered milestones in ASEAN's internal development. On that ground, it would be useful to refer to the creation of ASEAN plus Three. Its creation in 1999 is an event that underlines the considerable role of ASEAN in promoting regional cooperation. China, South Korea and Japan have understood ASEAN's importance in the region, so they could not stay out of the 'game'. Thus, they joined ASEAN and as a result the ASEAN plus Three was created.

## **1.2. ASEAN as a Regional Organization and the Challenges of a Common Identity**

ASEAN's role for the promotion of regional cooperation in Southeast Asia has attracted much attention in political and in academic terms. The dynamics of the integration process that have occurred in the region since the foundation of ASEAN could be seen as the main reason.

ASEAN was created by countries that had had as a priority their sovereignty. Yoshimatsu's argument is in line with such an assumption. "Indeed, Southeast Asia remains beholden to sovereignty as the fundamental principle of stability, and the ASEAN members have no intention of relinquishing sovereignty to a supranational agent".<sup>6</sup> Under these circumstances, regional integration would be

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<sup>4</sup> Dosch, Jörn (2004a), 'Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific: ASEAN', in Connors, Michael K. *et al* (eds), *The New Global Politics of the Asia-Pacific*, RoutledgeCurzon, New York, p. 74.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 87.

<sup>6</sup> Yoshimatsu, Hidetaka (2006), 'Collective Action Problems and Regional Integration in ASEAN'. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 28, No. 1, pp. 136-137.

an unrealistic possibility. However, ASEAN's evolution belies the above scenario. In the same vein, Emmerson's argument supports that "... the controversy over ASEAN's nature and what causes regional security has implicated mainly the opposite ends of this spectrum: constructivism on the one hand, realism on the other".<sup>7</sup> It can be supported then that ASEAN has moved from the realistic perceptions of its founders and has linked its continuity to the concept of a regional identity.

Additionally, Jones believes that "although there has not been a clearly articulated vision of regional identity with temporal benchmarks, there is a historical precedent for a regional identity and it lies in the context in which ASEAN arose".<sup>8</sup> Regional identity formation becomes, in that sense, one of the main issues that are interrelated with ASEAN's existence. Chang shares the same opinion by claiming that "the nexus of place, memory and identity finds particular resonance in Asia where changes in society, economics, politics and culture, since the 1990s, have engendered much discourse on the so-called 'Pacific century', 'Asian renaissance' and the rise of a 'New Asia' ".<sup>9</sup>

In the end, it becomes evident that ASEAN's formation in the region of Southeast Asia has been very crucial. Despite the statements that do not seem to be too supportive towards regional integration in the political sector, it is apparent that many opportunities can take place. The emerging concept of the 'Asian values' that has generated mythical debates between the East and the West is a proof that regional identity formation can be further promoted. Often, the so-called differences between the Eastern and the Western societies can react as a catalyst in order to strengthen the idea of a common identity in the region of Southeast Asia.

## *2. The European Union and its Engagement with Southeast Asia*

### **2.1. The EU's Policy towards Southeast Asia**

The EU has taken into consideration the important role of ASEAN. This is a consequence of the developments that concern regional integration processes during the last years in Southeast Asia. More specifically, Dent points out that "East Asia is becoming an increasingly coherent regional entity in political - economic terms, and remains a region of enormous geo-strategic significance for the European Union".<sup>10</sup> This argument explains why, according to Andreosso-

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<sup>7</sup> Emmerson, Donald K. (2005), 'Security, Community, and Democracy in Southeast Asia: Analysing ASEAN'. *Japanese Journal of Political Science*, Vol. 6, No. 2, p. 166.

<sup>8</sup> Jones, Michael E. (2004), 'Forging an ASEAN Identity: The Challenge to Construct a Shared Destiny'. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 26, No. 1, p. 141.

<sup>9</sup> Chang, T. C. (2005), 'Place, Memory and Identity: Imagining 'New Asia''. *Asia Pacific Viewpoint*, Vol. 46, No. 3, p. 247.

<sup>10</sup> Dent, Christopher M. (2009), 'Japan, China and East Asian Regionalism: Implications for the European Union'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 161.

O'Callaghan, "the EU Commission has selected the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as one of the few key partners for the conduct of free trade agreement (FTA) negotiations".<sup>11</sup>

In this framework it is easy to adopt the assumption that the EU-ASEAN relations, apart from the economic aspect can move to a further step. In the same vein, Rössler points out that "Asia and Europe are the world regions with the most advanced forms of regional integration...EU and ASEAN are pioneers in this regard...Asia's open regionalism profits from the interregional relations with Europe and so does the EU".<sup>12</sup> Consequently, it becomes apparent why the EU promotes mutual dialogue in the region and tries to further establish its presence there.

However, the relations between the EU and Southeast Asia have not emerged only due to the challenges of the new global order. The colonial ties that some of the European countries had had with the region can be seen as another characteristic that has generated the European attention. "For centuries Southeast Asia has attracted European interest, with the result that ideas, practices and technology from Europe have shaped the development of the region's economic, social, legal and political systems".<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, the economic development that has taken place in the region came to highlight Southeast Asia's importance for the EU. "Over the past decade, a major geo-economic shift has taken place in the global economy with regard to trade interdependence between Europe and Asia".<sup>14</sup> Therefore, the EC has proposed a more coherent approach regarding the EU's relations with the Asian countries. "In 1994, the EU commission published a document with the title "Towards a New Asia Strategy", [which is] considered the starting point of the EU's coordinated policy towards Asia...The EU's overall strategy towards Asia was further developed with another document, "Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships", published by the Commission in 2001".<sup>15</sup>

In 1994, the Commission's Communication clearly stated that "...the European Union should seek to develop its political dialogue with Asia and should look for ways to associate Asia more and more in the management of international affairs, working towards a partnership of equals capable of playing a constructive and stabilizing role in the world".<sup>16</sup> As a result, the EU tried to strengthen the basis of

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<sup>11</sup> Andreosso-O'Callaghan, Bernadette (2009), 'How is the EU-ASEAN FTA viewed by ASEAN Stakeholders?'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 63.

<sup>12</sup> Rössler, Jörg (2009), 'Eurasia: Re-emergence of Two World Regions – The Effects of Interregionalism on Regional Integration'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 314.

<sup>13</sup> Konstadakopoulos, Dimitrios (2009), 'Cooling the Earth? The Changing Priorities of EU-Asia Technology Cooperation'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 347.

<sup>14</sup> Gavin, Brigid and Sindzingre, Alice (2009), 'EU Trade Relations with Emerging Asia: Identifying the Issues'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 10.

<sup>15</sup> Pardo, Ramon Pacheco (2009), 'The Political Weakness of the EU in East Asia: A Constructivist Approach'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 265.

<sup>16</sup> Commission of the European Communities (1994), 'Towards a New Asia Strategy', Brussels, July 1994, visited on March 2011, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:1994:0314:FIN:EN:PDF>.

political dialogue with the Southeast Asian countries. The above explain why there have been formal agreements since 1980 between the EU and ASEAN. An example of the EU-ASEAN relations is that the EU became a member of the ASEAN Post Ministerial Conference, which later led to the creation of the ASEAN Regional Forum.

Nevertheless, the Commission made further proposals in a Communication, which was published in 2001. Apart from underlying the importance for supporting the EU's presence in the region through the formalized relations that it had created, at the same time it highlighted the considerable role of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). According to the Communication "the ASEM process has offered an excellent example of inter-regional cooperation, and it will continue to work to ensure that it can make progress in each of its "three pillars" (political, economic, and social)".<sup>17</sup> The impact of the ASEM will be additionally analyzed in the following section because it reveals an interesting aspect of the EU's vision in the region of Southeast Asia.

To end, I would like to point out that all the above actions make clear that the EU is trying to pursue a more influential role in Southeast Asia by the institutionalization of its relations with ASEAN. Such an effort will enable the EU to have an active presence in the region in order to promote its own political ideas, values and interests.

## **2.2. The Role of the ASEM as a Channel of Dialogue and Interaction between the EU and ASEAN**

The ASEM process that was initiated in 1996, became a useful tool for the EU because it facilitated the existence of a multipolar setting in Southeast Asia. The ASEM is a forum that functions as a channel of dialogue and cooperation between the EU and Asia. Cooperation is promoted in political, economic and socio-cultural terms. The establishment of the ASEM has contributed positively to the building of regional identity in Asia. Regional cooperation in East Asia presents a clear example of cooperation that was facilitated by the ASEM, especially, if we take into consideration the different perceptions that Asian countries have for the concept of regional identity. However, there are clear differences in the way that the ASEM is faced not only by the Europeans but by their Asian counterparts as well.

Barroso, speaking as the president of the EC, believes that "the intensification of activity under all three ASEM pillars - political, economic and socio-cultural - since Helsinki, underlying ASEM's strength as a facilitator of dialogue, policy laboratory and its commitment to strengthening multilateralism".<sup>18</sup> During the meetings, the

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<sup>17</sup> Commission of the European Communities (2001), 'Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships', Brussels, September 2001, visited on March 2011, available at <http://eur-lex.europa.eu/LexUriServ/LexUriServ.do?uri=COM:2001:0469:FIN:EN:PDF>.

<sup>18</sup> Barroso, José Manuel Durão (2009), 'Europe and Asia must be Involved with their Global Partners in Finding Solutions to this Global Crisis'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 7.

equal status of the participants is often stressed out. However, the practice shows that the EU is trying to pursue a leading role in the process. In addition, the different objectives of the EU and those of the Asian countries can be an evidence of the problematic situation that the ASEM faces. As Forster points out, "in many ways the dysfunctionality of the ASEM is a consequence of a sub-optimal framework that lacks a core agreement about what the objectives are".<sup>19</sup> On one hand, the EU sees the ASEM as a means for further regulation in an institutionalized framework for its relations with the region. On the other hand, Asian members view the ASEM as a way to further promote and coordinate their economic interests by sticking to the doctrine of 'non-interference' when it comes to cases of political decisions.

Despite the above arguments, the ASEM can still result in a 'common place' between the two regions when the concept of integration is examined. According to Reiterer, "as an open dialogue process stressing the equality of participants ASEM could contribute to bridging the gap between the two concepts of integration: the European value law and institution based and the Asian one with its statist preoccupation with sovereignty, functionalism and consensus (Asian or ASEAN way)".<sup>20</sup> Therefore, it becomes obvious that both sides can obtain positive lessons from such cooperation, despite their different perspectives in issues that are related to further regional integration.

Finally, the EU, especially now, faces a crisis due to the current economic environment and as a result there are many that question its model of integration. Euroscepticism has risen and solutions for emerging challenges are urgently needed. On the contrary ASEAN, in Zhang's words, "...has been turned into the hub of regional networks and has consequently become the anchor of regional integration".<sup>21</sup> Therefore, the role of ASEM is crucial not only for promoting cooperation between the EU and ASEAN but for functioning at the same time as a platform of good practices between the two organizations.

### *3. Evaluating the EU's Policy for the Promotion of a Regional Identity in Southeast Asia*

It is evident that in Southeast Asia "...the economic and political face of the region has significantly changed since the mid-1990s and so have European perceptions, strategies and policies".<sup>22</sup> Consequently, the EU tried to create a more solid relationship with the region. This attempt resulted in a further institutionalization

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<sup>19</sup> Forster, Anthony (2000), 'Evaluating the EU-ASEM Relationship: A Negotiated Order Approach'. *Journal of European Public Policy*, Vol. 7, No. 5, p. 799.

<sup>20</sup> Reiterer, Michael (2009), 'Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM): Fostering a Multipolar World Order through Inter-regional Cooperation'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 7, p. 195.

<sup>21</sup> Zhang, Jun (2008), 'EU in ASEM: Its Role in Framing Inter-regional Cooperation with East Asian Countries'. *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 6, p. 498.

<sup>22</sup> Dosch, Jörn (2004b), 'Europe and the Asia-Pacific', in Connors, Michael K. *et al* (eds), *The New Global Politics of the Asia-Pacific*, RouthledgeCurzon, New York, p. 105.

of their interaction. In this regard, Dosch argues that "...compared with two decades or even ten years ago, today European-Asian relations are fairly institutionalized. The 'third' link of the international order is not comparable to highly formalized transatlantic relations but has come close to match transpacific links".<sup>23</sup>

The EU, as a normative actor, has used its soft power, mainly, through its partnership with ASEAN and its participation in the ASEM in order to promote the so-called 'European way' of integration in the region. However, "unresolved territorial and historical issues" make the promotion of political integration almost unrealistic.<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as Malik argues, "most Europeans remain sceptical of the so called "Asian values" ".<sup>25</sup> To my opinion, this scepticism reveals a wrong attitude, when the focus is on the value hierarchy in Southeast Asia. It can be easily understood that there is the same core of values that the EU has as a cornerstone; but they are perceived from a different perspective. Of course, this happens due to the region's different cultural, social, historical and religious background. The above reality, however, can help us understand why the relations between the EU and Southeast Asia have adopted a less ideologically value- based character during the last years.

In addition, according to Stevenson, the "conventional wisdom in the west" leaves little space for adopting the EU's identity perceptions in Southeast Asia.<sup>26</sup> Still, instead of quitting the 'race', the EU has shown an increased interest in the region and has intensified its attempt to promote political dialogue. Maybe, this is evidence that it is about time the EU escaped from the vicious circle that is created by considering its model as the right solution for the achievement of regional integration. It is always good to have in mind that "regional community building is a long term project. It is worth remembering that the European Union has taken decades to reach its current form and shape".<sup>27</sup> Moreover, regional identity building has different applications in the region of Southeast Asia, which is characterized by its diversified political, economic, social, historical and cultural character. According to Lawson's arguments "...for ASEAN, the issue of regional stability and security was the primary impetus for its formation and its economic role has historically been very limited. This contrasts with formal regional integration processes elsewhere".<sup>28</sup> Thus, by trying to apply European 'mechanisms' of integration in Southeast Asia that would probably result in an unsuccessful attempt.

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<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 110.

<sup>24</sup> Malik, Mohan (2007), 'The East Asia Community and the Role of External Powers: Ensuring Asian Multilateralism is not Shanghaied'. *Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol. 19 No. 4, p. 33.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>26</sup> Stevenson, Adlai E. (2004), 'Regional Financial Cooperation in Asia'. *Journal of Asian Economics*, Vol. 15, p. 840.

<sup>27</sup> Malik, op. cit., p. 48.

<sup>28</sup> Lawson, Stephanie (2005), 'Regional Integration, Development and Social Change in the Asia-Pacific: Implications for Human Security and State Responsibility'. *Global Change, Peace & Security*, Vol. 17, No. 2, p. 111.

It becomes, then, obvious that a model similar to that of the EU in Southeast Asia would be impossible because "ASEAN has established practical modes of cooperation in dealing with common regional problems. It has fostered a certain level of regional affinity among certain sectors of the region's elites".<sup>29</sup> At this point, it has to be mentioned that the EU's policy towards ASEAN should not be undermined. It has fostered to a certain extent the creation of the concept of regional identity in Southeast Asia. The above becomes evident, especially, if we take as an example the cooperation between the countries in the region of East Asia. Furthermore, the ASEM has become a vehicle for promoting the concept of a shared identity in order to achieve regional cooperation. During the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM meeting in 2010 the Chair's Statement underlined that the ASEM contributes in a positive way in issues that are related to regional cooperation and mutual understanding.<sup>30</sup>

In the end, I would point out that on one hand, the EU's policy in Southeast Asia has been successful in promoting cooperation and to some extent the creation of a regional identity like in the case of East Asian countries. On the other hand, the different cultural, historical, social and economic background of the two regions has often created obstacles for the EU, when it comes to the promotion of its own solutions and strategies for the creation of a regional identity according to the European standards. Therefore, despite the grey areas in the EU-ASEAN relations, there are signs of positive interaction between the two organizations in regard to regional integration issues.

## *Conclusion*

Both in Europe and in Southeast Asia, there are attempts of regional integration. The European example deals with the creation of the EU and its evolution as a model of regional cooperation. In the case of the EU, it is clear that it has resulted in one of the most studied cases in the fields of political science and international relations. It is considered a 'sui generis' case because there is no other regional organization that can be compared to the EU. The economic cooperation that began in Europe resulted in further political integration and expanded with the accession of more member states and a number of countries that are waiting to gain the status of the candidate members. As a result, the EU increased its soft power and became an important actor in the international setting.

On the contrary, ASEAN depicts an interesting case of regional integration in Southeast Asia that in the last decades has successfully moved towards a more integrated concept of cooperation. However, it cannot yet be considered as a model similar to the one of the EU. Despite this, the ASEAN's case has attracted

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<sup>29</sup> Severino, Rodolfo C. (2007), 'ASEAN Beyond Forty: Towards Political and Economic Integration'. *Contemporary Southeast Asia*, Vol. 29, No. 3, p. 422.

<sup>30</sup> Asia-Europe Meeting (2010), 'Chair's Statement of the Eighth Asia-Europe Meeting', Brussels, 4-5 October 2010, visited on February 2011, available at [http://www.asem8.be/sites/default/files/ASEM%208%20Chair%27s%20Statement\\_0.pdf](http://www.asem8.be/sites/default/files/ASEM%208%20Chair%27s%20Statement_0.pdf).

the interest of the EU. Therefore, the latter has tried to promote a more active policy in order to facilitate and establish a solid basis for political dialogue between the two regions.

In that sense, the EU is in an advantageous position because it already has an advanced level of integration and at the same time it has a specific rhetoric concerning its common values and identity. ASEAN, in contrast, has a less institutionalized model of cooperation and a number of challenges to face when it comes to the creation of a shared identity. As a consequence, the EU could have the chance to promote political cooperation with ASEAN in order to strengthen identity building in the region and to some extent to promote its own perceptions.

Nonetheless, the EU's model of integration should not be seen as a panacea for all cases of regional integration. "The EU carries out roles and functions that Asian countries may not wish to assume".<sup>31</sup> Consequently, we cannot judge the EU's policy for promoting regional integration as a zero sum game. In cases like this of East Asia the EU through the ASEM process has achieved regional cooperation but on the contrary it has not been able to promote the idea of an integration process similar to its own in the region Southeast Asia. As Murray, clearly points out "the EU and Asia are attempting to advance regional integration in contexts which differ from each other".<sup>32</sup> Therefore, there is no fixed formula to be proposed for Southeast Asia. The positive aspect is that EU has achieved to strengthen its relations with ASEAN, one of the most promising international actors in the next decades. In addition, their close cooperation will enable them to find easier solutions in issues that are of common concern.

At this point, I would like to refer to Mahbubani. He argues that, "the time has come for the West to consider the possibility that other nations and communities are as competent, in managing global and regional challenges".<sup>33</sup> In that sense, maybe there is no need for ASEAN to emulate the EU. As a result we cannot see the success of the EU through the similarities that probably exist between the regional integration processes in Europe and Asia. The close interaction between the two regions can already be considered as a success. At the same time, during this challenging period, especially for the EU, there are valuable lessons to be taken from the 'ASEAN way', in order to tackle problematic situations that require urgent solutions.

Finally, it becomes clear that the EU-ASEAN interaction creates a fruitful context in which both organizations can only be profited. It remains now to see how this cooperation will evolve in the near future.

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<sup>31</sup> Murray, Philomena (2005), 'Should Asia Emulate Europe?', in *Regional integration: Europe and Asia compared*, Moon, Woosik *et al* (eds), Ashgate, Aldershot, p. 204.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 211.

<sup>33</sup> Mahbubani, *op. cit.*, p. 216.

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