BART GAENS AND GAURI KHANDEKAR

Inter-Regional Relations and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

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Bart Gaens · Gauri Khandekar
Editors

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CHAPTER 1

Introduction

Bart Gaens and Gauri Khandekar

Launched in 1996 as an initiative of the Singaporean and French governments to enhance Asia-Europe relations, the first Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) summit in Bangkok, Thailand, in March 1996 brought together the then 15 member states of the European Union (EU), the European Commission, 7 members of the Association of East Asian Nations (ASEAN) , China, South Korea, and Japan. Today, ASEM's membership has expanded to a total of 51 European and Asian nations, in addition to the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat. ASEM remains the sole platform dedicated exclusively to Asia-Europe relations and is increasingly transforming into a Eurasian forum with recent membership expansions to Russia, Kazakhstan, and Mongolia. Still an intergovernmental platform without the legal framework of an international organization, European and Asian governments meet within its ambit to discuss the future of inter-continental relations, interregional interaction at numerous levels, and global affairs. In two decades of its existence, the forum has brought together leaders from both sides, in addition to providing a continuous

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dialogue mechanism for officials, experts, parliamentarians, and civil society on foreign affairs, economic, financial, environmental, cultural and educational issues. As such, ASEM has promoted interregionalism in unprecedented ways.

Furthermore, in the light of ASEM's extraordinary growth over the past two decades, the forum's potential global weight is undeniable. According to recent figures, the total population of ASEM countries hovered around 4.6 billion in 2015, accounting for 62.1% of the global population (Eurostat 2016a, p. 12). ASEM includes seven out of ten of the world's strongest economies, as well as regional powers such as China, India, Japan, and Russia. It comprises two of the world's most integrated regions, the EU and Southeast Asia. It is therefore no surprise that ASEM is also a juggernaut in terms of economy and trade. According to EU figures, ASEM countries produced 57.6% of global GDP[1], and accounted for nearly 70% of global merchandise trade[2] in 2014, namely 71% of exports, and 67% of all imports (Eurostat 2016b, p. 1–2).

Nevertheless, Europe-Asia relations continue to perform below their potential. Both regions recognize a shared future but fail to build a sustainable path towards it. Strategic differences exist in political issues such as the Ukraine and Russia's annexation of Crimea, security matters including territorial disputes, and efforts to liberalize interregional trade. Europe currently views Asia principally through a geopolitical lens, a perspective the EU as a *sui generis* organization finds hard to adapt. Today, individual EU member states have lost the global weight they once bore to have an impact on Asia's turbulent geopolitics. Furthermore, when it comes to trade, EU member states each follow a geoeconomic approach towards Asia, which sees them competing against each other for preferential treatment in trade and investment, in particular in countries with whom the EU does not have a free trade agreement (FTA). The EU has endeavored to sign FTAs with almost all of its Asian ASEM partners, yet its approach has lacked strategic direction, and most FTAs remain under negotiation for nearly a decade. Third, the EU and individual member states prioritize certain Asian countries such as China over other ASEM members, which reflects poorly on Europe's relations with other Asian countries. As for Asia, geopolitical crises in the EU's southern and eastern neighborhoods are less of a priority than economics. Asia's key consideration in relations with the EU and its member states concerns bilateral trade and investment ties. For almost all of Asia (except perhaps

Japan, Australia, and New Zealand), geopolitical themes are sovereign matters of a state. Most Asian countries continue to harbor a suspicion of Europe given the continent's colonial history. Trust remains an issue.

ASEM itself as an interregional forum at twenty years of age, in spite of its potential global weight, is exposed to external criticism and faces key internal hurdles. Most importantly, as the only platform solely dedicated to Asia and Europe the process is seen as failing to play a relevant role as a major international cooperation structure. Dubbed a mini-United Nations, the forum is seen as lacking concrete outcomes, remaining at the level of a talking shop. Most of ASEM's initiatives lack visibility and mass appeal. The general public's awareness of ASEM as an actor in the global power structure remains remarkably low. Internally, not all member governments are equally involved, and some may even be losing interest in the forum, at a time when it has become crucial to underscore Europe-Asia relations in an increasingly interconnected world subject to transnational crises. The lack of a shared vision and different opinions on the way to move forward constitute some of ASEM's greatest challenges.

Nevertheless, ASEM remains important for multiple reasons. First, ASEM represents the combined weight of Asia and Europe, and underscores the political, economic, and sociocultural interdependency between both continents. As such it serves as a mirror of the progress that both regions have made in establishing a political dialogue including on sensitive issues such as human rights; in promoting two-way trade and investment; in enhancing cultural and social exchange; and in involving different stakeholder groups in order to include a bottom-up dimension to a summit-level process.

Second, ASEM remains a crucial test case of inter-regional engagement in practice. It is certainly true that ASEM's initial region-to-region setup has transformed. Membership has expanded to include South and Central Asian countries, Russia, Australia, New Zealand, and non-EU countries Norway and Switzerland. Reflecting a world that is increasingly multinodal (or multipolar) in nature, ASEM has evolved into a rather diffuse and comprehensive transregional (Eurasian) gathering. The role of well-integrated regions displaying a certain degree of actorness has diminished, and an increasing resistance can be witnessed against the transfer of sovereign power to transnational entities, as the EU's internal crisis and the outcome of the Brexit referendum show. Even so, ASEM retains its "bipolar" structure and coordination, and improving the interlinkage (in all its dimensions) between both regions (or continents) has

even turned into ASEM prime *raison-d'être*. ASEM therefore remains a salient forum, not so much to examine pure region-to-region relations, but to observe the interplay between multilateral, transregional, interregional, subregional, and bilateral relations. It other words, it provides an important opportunity to observe what happens to the contours of interregionalism, when a large number of states and non-state actors from two regions in addition to two regional organizations come together in an international institution.

Third, ASEM's significance as a dialogue forum is only growing, in particular in an era of political polarization, increasing economic inequality, rising populism, and transnational challenges (often referred to as non-traditional security challenges) such as climate change, sustainable development, and migration. Importantly, ASEM is still a forum without the United States. It therefore provides the opportunity for European and Asian countries, the EU and ASEAN to promote a habit of cooperation and address shared interests in the economic or non-traditional security sphere, even if both regions continue to entertain strong relations with the United States in terms of hard security. The absence of the United States and the focus on dialogue can also continue facilitating the engagement and "socialization" of emerging regional and global powers, such as China, Russia, and India.

Fourth, ASEM's role as a forum gathering not only political leaders, but also businesspeople, academic communities, civil society representatives and NGOs, parliaments, labor fora, and youth is gaining in importance. As this volume shows, ASEM's "democratic dimension" has made significant progress, and both horizontal communication between the different stakeholder groups and the input they can deliver to the government level will be key defining factors for the future of the forum.

It can therefore be said that the ASEM process, bringing together a highly diverse membership with different priorities, has made remarkable achievements in transcending numerous differences. Not only has it brought together the highest level of leadership in a cooperative environment, but it has also connected a high number of other stakeholder groups. The most recent summit in Mongolia, held under the overarching theme of "Partnership for the Future through Connectivity," endorsed a "strong resolve to work together to energize ASEM, promote further connectivity, mutually beneficial partnership and cooperation between Asia and Europe" (ASEM 2016). The future of

Asia-Europe relations and of ASEM lies precisely in this ambition to connect regions and their people.

On 15 and 16 July 2016, Heads of State and Government or their high-level representatives from 51 European and Asian countries, and leaders from EU and ASEAN institutions gathered in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the ASEM process. At this important junction, this edited volume sets out to look back at ASEM's two-decade history, by focusing on the process's key dimensions, defining themes, main driving forces, and core challenges. What are ASEM's achievements, and to what extent has ASEM withstood the test of time? To what extent is external criticism, that ASEM has not sufficiently promoted cooperation to the benefit of the peoples of both regions, warranted? In addition, it is the overall aim of the book to scrutinize the current state of affairs within ASEM, and look ahead to the future by pointing out possible new directions to re-energize the forum.

The second chapter by Bart Gaens frames the discussion to be dealt with in more detail in the other chapters. It starts with a cursory overview of the evolving breadth of issue areas ASEM has aimed to tackle in the course of two decades. It thereafter looks at the particularities of ASEM's institutional design, in order to explain the "ASEM Way," marked by a focus on informality, consensus, and dialogue. The chapter also sketches ASEM's changing contours as an interregional forum. While ASEM was never about pure region-to-region interaction, in recent years there has been a marked shift towards more transregional relations and a new emphasis on bilateralism. Looking to the future, the analysis singles out the tension between informality and institutionalization, and the different opinions on whether to prioritize dialogue or tangible outcomes, as two of ASEM's key internal challenges.

Economy and trade were ASEM's initial driving forces. Chapter 3 by Gauri Khandekar therefore first assesses ASEM's so-called economic pillar. She addresses the main causes of the limited progress in the economic pillar, before looking at possible new directions and shifts in focus. After two decades, it is clear that, while economic relations have continued to show strong growth, ASEM's emphasis on economy has weakened. The economic pillar is said to be in need of revitalization, the lack of progress in economic cooperation is the target of criticism, and the dialogue on trade and economy is in search of new directions.

The fourth chapter by Axel Berkofsky examines the security dialogue within ASEM. Security has certainly achieved a much more prominent

position in the ASEM dialogue during the past decade. However, the chapter argues that there exists a strong discrepancy between the comprehensive security agenda and the pervasive dialogue taking place on traditional and non-traditional security issues on the one hand, and ASEM's limited mandate and resources on the other. The author identifies a number of issues that explain the gap between inflated expectations and reality, and proposes a way forward based on realism and a more confined agenda.

Focusing on the role of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), ASEM's only institution, Chap. 5 by Huong Le Thu zooms in on the value of social/cultural initiatives in the ASEM process. It looks at ASEF's history, development, and relation to the official ASEM process. The author continues by analyzing the way ASEF has defined cultural cooperation, and by critically evaluating the foundation's role as a cultural broker. While highly appraising ASEF's role in ASEM's third pillar, the chapter also points out several weaknesses, challenges and limitations that ASEF will need to address in the future.

Chapter 6 by Silja Keva examines the involvement of parliamentarians from Europe and Asia in the ASEM process, through their participation in the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP). The analysis explores ASEP from a threefold perspective. First, it looks at the link with "the people" and ASEM's democratic dimension, thereby contributing to the debate on democratic accountability and the so-called democratic deficit in regional and global governance institutions. Second, it assesses ASEP's internal challenges and their relation to the official Government summits. Third, the chapter analyzes ASEP's correlation with national parliaments and individual parliamentarians.

The focus on ASEM's bottom-up dimension continues in Chap. 7 by Lai Suet-Yi. It explores ASEM's engagement with non-state actors and the involvement of stakeholders such as the general public and the media. At the same time, the chapter conducts a thorough analysis of ASEM's lasting challenge of public visibility and awareness. The author argues that, instead of seeking high visibility, ASEM should focus its limited resources on improving the quality of its public profile and on promoting its core mission of boosting ties and raising awareness between both regions. ASEM's task ahead is to tackle the critique of being too elite-oriented.

Chapter 8, by Gauri Khandekar, deals with ASEM's attempts to implement innovation. An internal process of "reinventing" ASEM has

been set in motion with the 2006 Summit in Helsinki, suggesting the creation of a number of issue/interest-based groups of member countries to lead projects that could eventually involve others. Yet the chapter places question marks on the viability of such "coalitions of the willing." Instead, the chapter explores whether ASEM could focus on two signature initiatives in areas of broadly shared interests that could involve all members and deliver concrete and high-utility outputs with a focus on connectivity and sustainability.

The following Chap. 9, by Bart Gaens, explores ASEM's process of widening and the implications this has had on the forum. Enlargement is a sign of a forum's success, but it also has ramifications for the interregional structure, coordination, cohesion, working methods, and so on. The chapter first provides a thorough overview of the different stages of enlargement. It then looks at the formal rules for horizontal widening, and how they tie in with how regions are defined, what role is played by regional organizations, and how numerical balance between the two groupings in ASEM plays a role. Enlargement has had an undeniable impact on a number of issues, which are dealt with throughout the chapters in this volume. This chapter zooms in on two in particular. First, it looks at the influence enlargement had on cooperation on the ground, and provides an alternate take on the "issue-based coalitions" also addressed in the preceding chapter. Second, it looks at the ramifications of widening on coordination and the attempts to streamline institutional mechanisms.

Chapter 10, authored by Gauri Khandekar, examines European perceptions of ASEM as a platform over the forum's two-decade history, revealing European priorities. ASEM forms an integral part of the interaction between Europe and Asia at both the interregional level and among the group of countries involved. ASEM serves two crucial functions: it is the only platform for Europe-Asia dialogue at an intercontinental level, and is the European strategic equivalent to the American-led Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) . The chapter critically examines Europe's objectives for ASEM, including how it seeks to utilize it as a tool to engage with an economically strong region, as well as an instrument to address and solve regional and global challenges. From a more comprehensive angle, the chapter seeks to answer the question of Asia's strategic importance to Europe.

In Chap. 11, Roopmati Khandekar looks at Asian perspectives on ASEM, starting from more general perceptions harbored by Asian

countries vis-à-vis Europeans and the EU. The chapter gives a comprehensive, geographically-structured overview of the policy lines of the main players in ASEM's Asian grouping. As a result of the analysis, she outlines the potential strengths of the forum, but also clearly demarcates a number of pitfalls that for Asian countries in general may hamper a more fruitful use of the ASEM forum.

Notes

1. The total global GDP was 58,741 billion euro, of which Europe contributed 25.3%. Asia's share in the global economy is clearly rising, as opposed to Europe's. Europe's share dropped from 32.5 to 25.3%, whereas the shares of China, India and Russia increased significantly (Eurostat 2016a, p. 16).
2. The EU accounts for approximately half of this figure, but its share in total trade in goods is decreasing. In 1996 the EU contributed more than three fifths of all ASEM trade flows, but in 2014, after the global financial and economic crisis, the EU's share fell to 50.6% of exports and 50.7% of imports (Eurostat 2016a, p. 18).

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CHAPTER 2

Two Decades of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

Bart Gaens

1 Introduction

This chapter takes a closer look at the Asia-Europe Meeting as an interregional forum for dialogue, in order to provide a wider context for the other, more issue-specific chapters in this volume. The first section gives a concise historical overview of ASEM's evolving foci and issue areas, from the forum's foundation in 1996 until the most recent summit of 2016 in Mongolia. The chapter then zooms in on ASEM's idiosyncratic features as an international institution, in particular as one designed to promote dialogue between countries from two regions. The analysis thereafter looks at ASEM's shifting contours and ongoing transition from an interregional to a transregional forum. The chapter concludes by looking ahead and pointing out two salient challenges, which divide the forum: the twofold tension between informality and institutionalization, and between dialogue and tangible outcomes.

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2 Historical Background: ASEM as an Evolving Forum

During the two decades since its founding in 1996, ASEM has evolved in a remarkable fashion. As outlined in more detail in Chap. 9, ASEM has transformed from an originally 26-member gathering into a vast summit of 53 partners including 51 states and 2 regional organizations from Asia and Europe. Also thematically ASEM has transformed markedly. A child of the post-Cold-War environment, the forum was conceived at a time when the global economic structure came to be described in terms of "tripolarity." This was based on the idea of geo-economics, namely that economic competitiveness forms a source of political power (cf. Luttwak 1990; Baru 2012). After the collapse of the Soviet Union, three major blocs, namely North America, East Asia, and Western Europe, were seen as driving the global economy. One of ASEM's main objectives was to promote the connections between East Asia and Europe, as these were regarded as being underdeveloped when compared to both Trans-Pacific and Trans-Atlantic ties. ASEM thus set out to "close the triangle" or "bridge the missing link" by balancing the relations between the three engines of the global economy.

It was therefore no surprise that economy and trade were ASEM's initial main driving forces. For the European Union (EU), East Asia's "miraculous" economic growth as of the 1980s formed an important incentive to seek rapprochement with Asia. The rise of strongly performing economies, and the gradual increase in intraregional trade and investments made East Asia the most dynamic region in the world. The creation of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) in 1989 formed an additional incentive for Europe to try and re-establish deeper links with countries and groupings in the Asian region. Reinforcing relations with the Association for Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) while at the same time engaging China into the global system played a particular role here. The European Commission's Communication entitled "Towards a New Asia Strategy" of 1994 was a clear sign of Europe's "turn to Asia" (European Commission 1994). The document also articulated the EU's deepening political integration, with the 1992 Maastricht Treaty introducing the Common Foreign and Security policy (CFSP) as a milestone. Europe's Asia Strategy therefore emphasized the EU's strengthened identity as a political actor on the global stage, underscored by a strong focus on normative objectives such as the promotion of democracy, rule of law, and respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms.

East Asian countries on the other hand were strongly aware of Europe as an export market and as a source of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in developing Asia. At the same time, the threat of stifling economic competition and the fear of a protectionist EU ("Fortress Europe") formed important rationales. For Asians, the promotion of economic ties with the EU was therefore a key underlying reason for seeking stronger ties. Not least importantly, ASEAN aimed to promote itself as the driver of regional economic integration, and as a dynamic and confident political actor. Furthermore, balancing an economically powerful and potentially unilateral United States was a local incentive to intensify relations with Europe. At the level of identity politics, East Asia was also eager to lay the ghosts of the colonial past to rest, and establish relations between equal partners with European countries.

Against this backdrop, Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong first floated the idea of a summit-level dialogue between both regions in October 1994, at the World Economic Forum (WEF) (Goh 2015). His proposal received backing from ASEAN. In Europe, it was France that lobbied strongly at the EU level, during its Presidency of the European Council in the first half of 1995.[1] After the European Council endorsed the initiative in June 1995, the agreement was struck to build an interregional partnership revolving around the three "baskets" of political dialogue, economic cooperation, and social/cultural ties. The first summit took place in Bangkok in March 1996, and welcomed 26 participants, including 15 EU member states plus the European Commission, and seven-member ASEAN in addition to China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Europe and Asia formally agreed to engage in a process of "mutual re-discovery" by fostering political dialogue, reinforcing economic links, and promoting cooperation in fields such as science and technology, education, environment, development, and people-to-people exchanges. The Bangkok summit marked the beginning of the ASEM process, highlighted by biennial summits at the level of Heads of State and Government. In addition to the summits, the process gave birth to a plethora of other meetings, seminars, workshops, and activities, at ministerial, senior official, and expert levels. Furthermore, ASEM also set out to bring together representatives of parliaments, the business community, civil society, youth, academia, and media in an interregional context.

As elaborated upon in Chap. 3, ASEM took a flying start in terms of initiatives geared toward the promotion of trade, economy, and investment. At least as important for ASEM's future development was the emphasis on non-interference, which was applied in order to keep

"sensitive" topics such as human rights off the table and prioritize economic cooperation. The first ASEM Chair's Statement of 1996 (ASEM1) stipulated that "the dialogue among the participating countries should be conducted on the basis of mutual respect, equality, promotion of fundamental rights and, in accordance with the rules of international law and obligations, non-intervention, whether direct or indirect, in each other's internal affairs." This phrase was repeated in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF2000), ASEM's core charter, and has been invoked on numerous occasions, in the first place by ASEAN countries as well as by China.

The 1997–1978 Asian Financial Crisis, however, stifled the optimism concerning Asia-Europe economic cooperation and trade liberalization. It also challenged the ASEAN way including values such as non-interventionism, and boosted the EU's return to value-based foreign policy (Wang 2012, p. 20). At the same time the crisis set in motion a gradual "securitization" process of the ASEM agenda, which was further enhanced by the attacks of 9/11 and their aftermath, and the 2003 War in Iraq (Hänggi 2004, pp. 93–94). Whereas ASEM2, held in London in 1998, was preoccupied with dealing with the fallout of the AFC, ASEM3 (Seoul 2000) focused on the situation on the Korean Peninsula. ASEM4 (Copenhagen 2002) paid attention to the root causes of terrorism, and aimed to promote interfaith and inter-civilizational dialogue. The run-up to ASEM5 in 2004 further focused the agenda on anti-terrorism and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

As of 2004 the intra-institutional challenge of enlargement and its implications took on a central role in ASEM. The contested membership of Myanmar hampered relations between the EU and ASEAN, and caused an impasse in the ASEM dialogue. Furthermore, the ASEM6 summit in Helsinki (2006) took the landmark decision to broaden the Asian grouping in ASEM beyond its ASEAN+3 constellation. It resulted in a gradual expansion process to include strongly emerging global players such as India as well as Russia, and to further branch out into Central Asia and Australasia. Partly in order to facilitate cooperation among an expanding number of countries, the ASEM6 summit launched the concept of issue-based leadership, allowing informal functional groups of states to drive forward tangible cooperation based on their interests through coalitions with other countries.

The global financial crisis (2007–2008) prompted the ensuing ASEM7 (Beijing 2008), ASEM8 (Brussels 2010), and ASEM9 (Vientiane 2012)

summits to return the focus to economic and financial governance. Summit hosts China and Laos in particular used the opportunity to try and re-launch trade and investment liberalization measures in ASEM. At the same time ASEM started to pay more attention to issues that can be placed under the label of non-traditional security (NTS). These "new," "soft," or NTS challenges included environmental degradation, disaster management, infectious diseases, migration, transnational crime, and illicit trafficking. More than on states, the emphasis came to lie on society, communities, people, and sustainable development. ASEM was perceived as a valuable tool to promote consensus-building, to share experiences through informal consultations, and to build a common agenda in the sphere of NTS, for example in issues such as customs cooperation and the fight against piracy.

The ASEM10 summit (Milan 2014), held under the theme of "Responsible Partnership for Sustainable Growth and Security," illustrated well the new focus on sustainable development. Water management and education in particular stand out as issues in which ASEM can serve as a valuable forum to share experiences and best practices. Education, for example, can contribute to lifting people out of poverty, preventing social exclusion, and promoting more sustainable growth. Dialogue and cooperation on compulsory education, on the use of new technologies in education, or on the development of employment-promoting skills are a promising area of cooperation, especially since, as of (2009), ASEM comprises a "sectoral secretariat" to ensure continuity and follow-up. The ASEM Education Secretariat functions on the basis of rotation and is hosted by one ASEM country for the term of 4 years, while other ASEM members are invited to second staff to the secretariat. Germany hosted the secretariat in Bonn for the first 4 years, after which Jakarta, Indonesia, took over in 2013. Belgium will host the secretariat as of Autumn 2017.

As of the latest ASEM11 summit (Ulaanbaatar 2016), all attention is geared toward connectivity. Connectivity is a very broad concept which can imply political connectivity (political and diplomatic linkages); physical connectivity and hard infrastructure (transport by air, road, rail, or sea); institutional connectivity and soft infrastructure (customs integration, liberalization of trade and services); technological connectivity (technology and innovation); and people-to-people connectivity (tourism, education, culture, exchanges between think tank and research communities). As such it encapsulates ASEM's evolving foci in one key

overarching banner, tying together trade, economy, sustainable development, and people-to-people exchanges. The most recent summit confirmed enhanced connectivity as an objective that should be mainstreamed in all ASEM cooperation frameworks.

3 Institutional Design: ASEM as an International Forum for Dialogue

ASEM's focal points and themes have thus evolved in the course of two decades, often in parallel to a transforming international environment. The process's core philosophy, working methods, and general objectives, however, have not changed dramatically. The forum's founding principles, working methods and meeting format were enshrined in the year 2000 in the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF), the basic charter outlining the "ASEM Way" which can be said to consist of five core components. First, ASEM is comprehensive and multidimensional. The agenda therefore covers all aspects of relations between the two regions, multilateral, interregional, subregional, as well as bilateral, including issues related to politics and security, economy and trade, and the sociocultural field. Second, dialogue is a goal in and of itself. ASEM was in the first place intended to serve as a platform fostering "mutual understanding and enhanced awareness through dialogue" (European Commission 1997) between two regional groupings. At the same time, the dialogue aimed to result in the identification of common ground and of priorities for concerted and supportive action. The process was to be conducted on the basis of equal partnership, mutual respect and joint benefit. Third, ASEM was intended to evolve in an open fashion. This applied in the first place to membership and partnership expansion, which aimed to be inclusive and conducted on the basis of consensus (see Chap. 9). But the topics and themes tackled by ASEM were to evolve as well. It was foreseen that ASEM's agenda would inevitably change along with the transforming global environment, not in the least because the forum intended to act as a political catalyst contributing to the ongoing cooperation at other levels of global governance, including the UN or the WTO. Furthermore, ASEM's internal development would steer the evolving agenda—new members would add potential and dynamism to the ASEM partnership, and drive the dialogue and cooperation forward in new directions.

Informality was a fourth key component of the process. The loose, non-binding and informal character as well as the comprehensive scope of the meeting derived in the first place from the novelty of the dialogue between the EU and Asia, a region that was regarded not only as very large but also as highly heterogeneous (European Commission 1996, p. 4). It was seen that an emphasis on informality would facilitate a non-binding exchange of views, experiences, and expertise on any topical and relevant political issue. Informality would also allow leaders of states and representatives of regions to confer with each other on topical and timely issues, while at the same time fostering closer personal and professional relationships. Dialogue would lead to a socialization process, which in turn would result in cooperation while at the same time smoothening progress in other multilateral, interregional, or bilateral contexts. ASEM's informal approach furthermore allows it to address issues that are considered "sensitive." In other words, it reduces obstacles to dialogue and cooperation, allowing for flexibility, speed, privacy, simplicity, and a swift adaptation to changed circumstances (Lipson 1991, p. 500).

Fifth and not least importantly, ASEM was intended to be a high-level gathering as well as a bottom-up process. The forum aimed to provide the opportunity for group-to-group and intergovernmental contacts at the Heads of State and Government level as well as at ministerial and official levels. At the same time, the explicit goal was to broaden the dialogue beyond the government level, and allow for bottom-up input in the discussions at higher levels. ASEM therefore from the outset expected to include civil society, an inter-parliamentary dialogue, and a meeting of business leaders (European Commission 1996, p. 12). The increasing involvement of youth and social actors is only the logical continuation of this idea.

ASEM's institutional design can be explained using both rationalist (the logic of consequences) and constructivist (the logic of appropriateness) perspectives. First, the forum's membership, scope, centralization, control, and flexibility can be accounted for by applying the rational-choice argument (Koremenos et al. 2001, p. 762) that "states use international institutions to further their own goals, and they design institutions accordingly." As for membership, an institution should restrict its membership as an enforcement problem poses itself, that is, as collective action based on voluntary contributions to group goals fails to deliver (Koremenos et al. 2001, p. 783). However, as not cooperation

but dialogue is ASEM's prime stated aim, and an enforcement problem does not arise, membership can be open, and extended to parliaments and non-state actors. Importantly however, ASEM has limited itself to comprehensively defined geographic regions of Asia and Europe (Eurasia), and hence excludes the United States. This was an important factor in the early years, but the risk of a more inward-turned United States during the Trump Presidency likely increases ASEM's importance again.

Issue scope dealt with by an institution increases with heterogeneity among larger numbers of actors (Koremenos et al. 2001, p. 785). ASEM's stated objective is to carry forward three key dimensions or pillars: fostering political dialogue, reinforcing economic cooperation, and promoting cooperation in other areas (cultural, social, and people-to-people). Crosscutting these pillars, issues have proliferated along with growing membership and increasing heterogeneity. The recent focus on connectivity, for example, interlinks political exchange, economic integration, trade and investment, sustainable development, and people-to-people contacts.

Furthermore, according to rationalist theory, centralization increases with number (Koremenos et al. 2001, p. 788). Thus far ASEM has shown increasing centralization of information, but aversion toward institutionalization remains high, again due to the emphasis on dialogue and not on tangible outcomes. The forum still lacks a secretariat, and as an informal process is only very loosely institutionalized. It does include one institution, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which focuses on cooperation in the socio-cultural dimension, that is, the so-called third pillar (see Chap. 6). Furthermore, ASEM does not have a Secretary-General.

The control factor in ASEM, in other words the body of rules for controlling the institution, is strongly embedded in equality and consensus. To decide on membership enlargement for example, a candidate country first needs to get support among the partners of its own region, before acquiring the approval of all the participants in the other region. As numbers increase, individual control decreases (Koremenos et al. 2001, p. 791). ASEM's growth can therefore also be explained as an attempt to dilute the influence of individual countries. At the same time, however, it cannot be denied that, as asymmetry among partners increases with enlargement, larger and more powerful individual countries hold greater sway in the institution.

ASEM's flexibility is high, as the institution emphasizes process over product, and allows for a low-profile discussion of issues on the global agenda without too much public scrutiny. ASEM is therefore often seen as a very Asian structure, closely incorporating elements of the so-called ASEAN Way and involving a high degree of discretion, privacy, pragmatism, informality, consensus-building, non-confrontation, and non-interference. As a result, ASEM does bear similarities to ASEAN-driven fora that value form over substance, often "confusing a proliferation of meetings and acronyms for a deepening of ties" (Banyan 2016).

In addition to the rationalist argument, ASEM's institutional design can be described in terms of constructivist models that "do not contradict rational-design theory but embed it within broader social or historical contexts that construct its elements (preferences, beliefs, and so on)" (Wendt 2001, p. 1021). According to the logic of appropriateness, states design institutions on the basis of what is normatively appropriate. For example, in the early-1990s when ASEM was conceived, EU member states were seeking to re-establish ties with former colonies in Southeast Asia, while at the same time aiming to engage or increase interaction with countries in Northeast Asia. For the EU countries, a focus on equality and consensus seemed normatively appropriate when dealing with former colonies, and an "Asian" institutional design aiming to promote informal dialogue was probably regarded as the proper way to seek closer ties with other Asian countries. Asian countries, for their part, regarded informal dialogue and soft institutionalization as desirable in order to bridge the perceived gap in communication between two distinct regions. ASEM is therefore also rooted in Habermas's concept of communicative rationality, which, unlike strategic rationality, is aimed at achieving consensus or understanding through deliberation and persuasion (Wendt 2001, p. 1046).

Dialogue and networking are thus core ingredients of the ASEM process. At the very basic level, it provides a forum to address a wide variety of international matters through dialogue, while at the same time helping to increase understanding through people-to-people contacts. It does not seek to make decisions or negotiate treaties, but to have indirect policy-shaping effects based on networking and alliance-building. As contended by German Foreign Minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier, "(w)ith ASEM cooperation, we are not looking for front-page news. It is rather the long-term and patient weaving of ties and networks that we work on, connecting Asia and Europe in an active partnership—ready for

the next decades" (Steinmeier 2016). In other words, ASEM caters to the very basic need for communication and interaction. As such ASEM "helps to reduce tensions, it promotes understanding, and it compels both sides to strengthen their own internal coordination—a feat in itself. Neither Asia nor Europe is a monolithic bloc: within each bloc, partners have their differences. Talking to each other in groupings makes us transcend these differences, or at least try to do so" (Ayrault 2016).

It is clear that this basic approach—the value of non-confrontational dialogue and the search for consensus—can be criticized. As mentioned above, ASEM's approach bears similarities to the ASEAN Way, in that the point of departure seems to be that "the overarching consensus is to have a consensus, usually in the form of a post-summit joint statement" (Banyan 2016, p. 46). Countries such as China, Laos, and Cambodia emphasize that ASEM is not a suitable forum to discuss contentious issues, and that they should be dealt with bilaterally. In spite of efforts by Japan, for example, to include issues such as China's actions in the South China Sea in the Chair's Statement, the EU in general exercises restraint, wary of affronting China.

On the positive side, the dialogue and outcome documents of summits can also result in an outline of joint policies and concrete deliverables that can be achieved elsewhere, for example in the field of development. The ASEM11 Chair's Statement, for example, included both the generally agreed principles on the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its implementation. These included an agreement to, externally, contribute to the follow-up and review of the UN and other global institutions, and, internally, to share best practices and experiences (ASEM 2016a). ASEM dialogue, therefore, often limits itself to the lowest common denominator but at its best it allows leaders from both regions to confirm their commitment to global goals, and pave the way for implementable steps for action.

Furthermore, ASEM as a dialogue forum provides the opportunity for bilateral meetings, thereby serving as a rationalizing agent. Allowing Heads of State and Government to engage with their counterparts from other countries in informal bilateral meetings behind closed doors and in rapid succession, has been and still is one of ASEM's main attractions. For example, at the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM8) in Hamburg in 2007, over 60 bilateral meetings took place in the sidelines of the official gathering, offering opportunities "to get to know each other, to sound out common ground—and also to get an idea of the

limits of common ground" (Steinmeier 2016). During the latest Summit in Ulaanbaatar, the Mongolian hosts held bilateral meetings with 60 partners, and the total of all other bilateral gatherings amounted to over 100 (Office of the President of Mongolia 2016).

The underlying aim of dialogue is to have a complementary function, in other words fulfill a mediating, rationalizing, and agenda-setting role vis-à-vis the system of global governance. Informal discussions within ASEM at top level aim to shape policies and ideally contribute to the adoption of a common stance in other relevant, more formal fora. As pointed out by Rüland (2006a, pp. 48–49), interregional structures such as ASEM are expected to facilitate global institutions' function by coordinating positions in an interregional context or steering the agenda-setting of these institutions. The summit-level dialogue furthermore provides the blueprint for specific initiatives and projects at the intergovernmental level. ASEM is therefore also a "delivery instrument," even if concrete outcomes may only materialize elsewhere. The forum is not a substitute for, but a complement to other bilateral and multilateral fora linking Asia and Europe, promoting the overall Europe-Asia relations on international and interregional issues of common interest. For example, at the latest summit in Mongolia in July 2016, Japanese Prime Minister Abe and President of the European Commission Jean-Claude Juncker agreed to speed up the negotiations for an EU-Japan Free Trade Agreement (FTA). As another example, ASEM importantly involves non-state actors in policy-related discussions. The Third ASEM Transport Ministers' Meeting (TMM) held in Riga in April 2015 gathered not only transport ministers but also other stakeholders such as private sector, international finance institutes, and scientists. This inspired Germany for their OSCE chairmanship in 2016, to invite representatives from politics, economy, and civil society from different regions and economic systems of the OSCE area for a business conference focusing on connectivity in May 2016 (Steinmeier 2016).

4 "Complex Interregionalism": ASEM as a Region-to-Region or Transregional Forum?

A third important aspect, in addition to issue areas and working methods, is ASEM's interregional setup. ASEM has most commonly been seen as a prime example of interregionalism, at least, in its original setup, in the form of an encounter between a regional organization and a

regional grouping. In the period following the end of the Cold War, the EU, often regarded as the epitome of institutionalized regional integration, aimed to play a more prominent role in the world by enhancing its possibilities for coherent external action. As a result, it sought to interact with other regional groupings in the world, leading to interregionalism getting into a higher gear. The EU-ASEAN relationship can be seen as an example of a pure region-to-region construction. Also in Asia multiple, overlapping, and complementary cooperation networks came into being, often with ASEAN as the hub. From the outset ASEM as an institution showed certain features of a region-to-region structure, even if it was never intended to function as a bloc-to-bloc construction. At present as well, ASEM's organizational set-up still follows a region-to-region or group-to-group structure, and coordination is grounded in a bi-regional set-up. This is confirmed by the Chair's Statement of the tenth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM10) of (2011): "It must be assured that with the enlargement of ASEM the effectiveness and efficiency of the forum is increased and the bipolar (Europe-Asia) model of interregional cooperation is retained as it is set in AECF 2000" (ASEM 2011).

Nevertheless, it is clear that today the importance of interregionalism, as one instrument in the toolbox of international relations, has dwindled, even if only some years ago it was hailed as forming a new layer in the system of global governance. Also the EU, a strong driver of interregional relations in the past decades, now places a much stronger emphasis on bilateral relations, as is obvious in the negotiations for FTAs with individual Asian countries. One of the initial region-to-region constructions, the EU-ASEAN trade-based relations, is now marked by bilateral negotiations between the EU and individual Southeast Asian countries. While some see this as "a case of failed interregionalism" (Meisner 2016), others describe these relations between an international organization and a third state as "quasi-interregional relations" (Hänggi 2006).

This shift away from, or at least the modification of, interregionalism is also obvious in ASEM. Compared with the original set-up, ASEM is now a significantly more diverse forum, composed of a very large and heterogeneous grouping of 53 in which the emphasis lies much more on the intergovernmental aspect and on bilateral relations (both state-to-state and EU-Asian state). The higher prominence of bilateral relations reflects the development of a more multipolar world, or even the crisis of globalization and resurgence of nationalism and populism, as marked by the Brexit, the election of Donald Trump as US president, and failure of large-scale

trade deals such as the Transpacific Partnership (TPP). In other words, ASEM serves as a signpost of the "changing interlinkages of bilateral, regional and transregional relations that the EU has around the globe" (Baert et al. 2014, p. 9). Rather than pursuing pure region-to-region relations with East Asia, as formerly was the ambition, the EU at present aims to establish differentiated interregional relationships with a much stronger role given to bilateral and transregional arrangements. In other words the EU currently pursues "complex interregionalism" (Hardacre and Smith 2014, pp. 92–95). Complex interregionalism takes account of the multidimensionality of cooperation, the diversity of agents and actors involved, and the close links to bilateralism, regionalism, and multilateralism (De Lombaerde et al. 2015), and is therefore a useful framework to explain ASEM's development.

For a number of reasons ASEM in its current form can also be described as an example of transregionalism. First, the forum includes a more comprehensive arrangement as for membership, not necessarily coinciding with regional organizations (Rüland 2006b, p. 296). ASEM has come to include non-EU states on the European side. While the Asian side includes the ASEAN Secretariat, the grouping does not correspond to a regional organization, and even includes states such as Russia that are most often not seen as either purely European or Asian. Second, interregional relations in ASEM "are dispersed, have weak actorship, and are formal bureaucratic structures which are not involved in negotiations among the regions" (Laatikainen 2015, p. 694). Third, transregionalism is also better suited as a concept to indicate the involvement of non-state (transnational) actors, such as the private sector and NGOs.

ASEM at present retains elements of a region-to-region structure, even if it has developed into a large transregional or complex-interregional institution. The tension therefore remains between ASEM's original set-up as a region-to-region forum, the reality of an intergovernmental Eurasian gathering, and the dream of a burgeoning "Commonwealth of nations from Europe and Asia" (Goh 2015).

5 The Road Ahead: ASEM as a Divided Forum

Within ASEM opinions are strongly divided over the forum's future path. Key questions revolve around, first, informality and the tension with formal interaction and institutionalization, and second, around the balance between dialogue and tangible outcomes.

5.1 The Challenge of Informal Dialogue

First, as outlined above, informal political dialogue remains a cornerstone of the ASEM partnership. Interviews with policymakers in Brussels confirm that the opportunity that ASEM offers for socialization and informal discussion among leaders is one of its greatest attractions. An important format facilitating informality has been the Retreat Session. It is marked by informal seating and more confidentiality, without note-taking or recording, without agenda or even an indicative list of topics, and without detailed reflection in the official summit documents. It allows for a less-structured, free-flowing discussion with fewer people present in the meeting room. The Retreat format has previously been successfully applied for example in the third ASEM FMM in 2001. It was introduced for the first time at summit level during ASEM4, held in Copenhagen in 2002, which included a Retreat Session under the heading "Dialogue on Cultures and Civilizations." The ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Delhi of November 2013 re-introduced the retreat format, and also the most recent summits in Milan (2014) and Ulaanbaatar (2016) included a retreat session in order to allow for the discussion of sensitive or contentious regional issues.

Nevertheless, ASEM has more than its fair share of formal interaction. Two issues in particular, relating to numbers and hierarchy, can be seen to impinge on informality. It is clear that informality becomes more difficult to implement with more leaders (and their advisers and supporting staff) in the room. Enlargement of the partnership to 53 members has therefore exacerbated the challenge of keeping the setting informal, and the issue will not diminish in importance with more prospective candidates on the horizon. Furthermore, informality at summits and higher-level meetings is very much dependent on representation. For example, it is hard to achieve informal interaction when some countries are represented by ministers and others by junior officials. The importance of hierarchy and its impact on dialogue should not be underestimated, certainly not when dealing with Asian countries. Attendance at the highest level has been seen as a problem within ASEM, not in the least for the EU (Keva and Gaens 2008, p. 120). The ASEM11 summit in Mongolia can be taken as an example. The summit was attended by 11 Heads of State, 23 Heads of Government, 13 Ministers of Foreign Affairs, and 3 special envoys, in addition to the leadership of two International Organizations (the

EU and ASEAN) (ASEM 2016b). Seventeen out of thirty European countries (including Switzerland and Norway) were represented at the highest possible level, that is, Heads of State and Government (HOSG).[2] Thirteen countries sent Vice Prime Ministers or other ministers,[3] whereas the UK (at the time of the Brexit referendum) sent a Special Envoy. The EU was represented by the President of the European Council, the President of the European Commission, and the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy. While European presence was at its highest level only in just over half of the countries, a similar picture can, more uncharacteristically, be drawn for Asian countries. Thirteen out of twenty-one Asian countries were present at the highest HOSG level, in addition to two Vice Presidents, a Deputy Prime Minister, two Foreign Ministers, one Deputy Foreign Minister, and two Special Envoys.[4]

The emphasis on informal dialogue, however, has not impeded a certain degree of institutionalization in the form of the creation of issue-specific ASEM centers, most often at the initiative of Asian countries. This is an interesting observation in light of the above-mentioned "Asian-style" emphasis on dialogue, meetings, networking, and consensus, and the elevation of form over substance. Indeed, as contended by Camroux and Lechervy (1996, p. 447) already in ASEM's year of inception, it was clear from early on that European countries were content to seek commitments, whereas Asian countries pursued individual projects for concrete implementation. In other words, the Europeans were process-oriented, whereas the Asians aimed to implement tangible initiatives. The following Table 1 provides an overview of these efforts.

Also, ASEM11 hosts Mongolia, aiming to leave a lasting legacy after the summit, proposed the creation of a small ASEM Center in Ulaanbaatar in order to the activities of ASEM stakeholder groups, ensure follow-up and improve institutional memory. The coordination center could channel the ideas and initiatives of a particular stakeholder group, for example, the network of think tanks, into the work of senior officials and the activities of other stakeholders (Islam 2016). In addition, it aimed to "share the good practices of the previous ASEM chairs, assist the future Chairs and thereby ensure ASEM's continuity" (ASEP 2016, p. 8). The proposal received insufficient support, however, arguably not in the least because of fears of creeping institutionalization and additional bureaucracy on the part of the European partners.

Table 1 Institutionalization of the ASEM process

Country	*Year*	*Initiative*	*Aim*
Malaysia	1996–2000	Trans-Asian Railway Network Project	Feasibility study
Singapore	1997–present	Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)	Intellectual exchange
Malaysia (Kuala Lumpur)	1997	Asia-Europe Centre (AEC), later Asia-Europe Institute (AEI)	Academic exchange
Thailand (Bangkok)	1999–2002	Asia-Europe Environmental Technology Center	Cooperation between environmental institutes
ROK (Seoul)	2011	TEIN (Trans-Eurasia information network) Cooperation Center (TEINCC)	ICT, network infrastructure
ROK (Seongnam)	2011	ASEM SMEs Eco-Innovation Center (ASEIC)	Environmental innovation of SMEs
China (Hunan)	2011	ASEM Water Resources and Development Center (ASEMWater)	R&D in water resources

5.2 The Tension Between Dialogue and Tangible Outcomes

ASEM remains a dialogue forum with few concrete outcomes. Two types of policy documents are generally seen as tangible outcomes of the summit, namely Chair's Statements and separate political declarations. The summit in Mongolia first of all produced a 13-page long Chair's Statement. This document is actually a misnomer. The host of the summit is responsible for producing the Chairman's Statement, but to a large extent it is a negotiated text, aiming to reflect a consensus. Efforts have been made earlier to make the document into a factual report of the meeting's discussions and to avoid repeating already known positions. These have largely failed, however. Today, ASEM Chair's Statements remain lengthy and comprehensive. The Mongolian summit produced a document of approximately 5600 words.[5] As a policy document, the Chair's Statement provides an overview of the main themes of the summit; renders agreed-upon support to international bodies while expressing concern on a wide range of issues; and reiterates ongoing work in other fora while highlighting actual and potential contributions of

the ASEM process to global affairs. For example, the most recent Chair's Statement drew attention to the ASEM Sustainable Development Dialogue (Budapest Initiative) as contributing to the SDG 2030 agenda, and ASEF and the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Program as contributing to interregional exchange and people-to-people connectivity. Interestingly, in an effort to increase ASEM visibility, the Chair's Statement also included the decision to annually celebrate an "Asia meets Europe/Europe meets Asia" ASEM Day on 1 March or during the first week of March.[6]

Furthermore, not all issues discussed at the summit are included in the document, and conversely, not all issues included in the statement are discussed at the summit. As such, what is mentioned and what is omitted reveal the common positions as well as points of contention between the partners. For example, retreat sessions at ASEM summits might address maritime security issues such as territorial disputes in the South China Sea, but the Chair's Statements will generally only refer to principles all partners can agree upon. Outcome documents of the most recent summits refer to accordance with principles of international law, the UN charter and the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), but not to contested issues or particular regional conflicts. Countries may therefore bring up during the summit sessions specific issues such as China's actions in the South China Sea or the need to create a Code of Conduct in maritime affairs, but most often there will be no reference to these in the Chair's Statement, only to overall principles.

ASEM summits also issue separate political declarations in response to global events and specific challenges. In fact, ASEM Summits have often been overtaken by major world events and international developments, such as the Asian Financial Crisis (London 1998), the 9/11-attacks and the ensuing war on terrorism (Copenhagen 2002), or the Nobel Peace Prize of South Korean President Kim Dae-Jung and the situation on the Korean Peninsula (Seoul 2000). Also, the Ulaanbaatar Summit was partly overshadowed by events elsewhere. A few hours before the summit on 15th July, the terrorist attacks in Nice took place, prompting the leaders to issue a "Statement of ASEM leaders on International Terrorism."[7]

Furthermore, the summit produced an "Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) into the Third Decade," which can be seen as a follow-up to the 2006 "Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM." It confirmed the importance of ASEM's core approach of informality and networking, but also emphasized the need to focus on areas of common interest to produce tangible outcomes, while encouraging

people's engagement and aiming to narrow development gaps. The Declaration also confirmed enhanced connectivity as an objective that should be mainstreamed in all cooperation frameworks. Importantly in the context of stakeholder outreach, the UB Declaration called for the official incorporation of the Asia-Europe Youth Forum, and also "took note" of the Asia-Europe Labor Forum as an additional stakeholder forum.

The resulting documents and statements of summits and the way they feed into the discussions can therefore be seen as "concrete outcomes" of the dialogue process. Nevertheless, the question whether ASEM should be a political process and a forum for dialogue on the one hand, or whether it should function much more as an effective international institution and a framework for cooperation on the other, remains a point of contention. ASEM's significant enlargement process in the past decade has only exacerbated the divisions on the forum's core identity. As pointed out by Vandenkendelaere (2011, p. 58), "minimalist" partner countries consider dialogue and loose cooperation as having added value as such, whereas "maximalist" members rather aim to pursue concrete results in and through ASEM, often in connection with efforts to promote institutionalization and achieve more efficient working methods.

In general, it can be said that the EU values ASEM as a forum for "constructive engagement" with Asian countries, emphasizing political dialogue to complement, but not encroach on, its economic agenda. For the EU informal dialogue with Asia constitutes a goal in itself and, as pointed out above, as the most normatively appropriate core principle for ASEM's institutional design. This marks an interesting contrast with the self-perception and predominant stereotypical view that "Europeans tend to press for tangible results," as an ASEM-related European Commission (2001, p. 2) document stated. But it is equally true that some European countries, especially smaller ones with less institutionalized bilateral ties with Asian countries, would support a higher result orientation for the ASEM process. On the Asian side, countries including China and India eagerly seek to promote more tangible cooperation. China, for example, is very eager to promote more pragmatic cooperation and restore ASEM's "original purpose of building a new-type of partnership aimed at promoting growth" (Cui 2016), thereby creating synergies with China's own Belt and Road connectivity projects with Asia and Europe as engines.

Other recently joined partners such as Australia take a more pragmatic approach and mainly seek to foster diplomatic ties with other participants, not in the least from the same region (Maier-Knapp 2014, p. 14). Countries such as Russia primarily see ASEM as a tool to symbolize their new focus on Asia as a dynamic region. Russia has thus far kept a relatively low profile in the forum, in spite of announced objectives to boost the development of Eurasian transport and communications through ASEM (see Lukyanov 2010, p. 97).

The difference in opinion among ASEM members is clear in the economic sphere. Many Asian countries but also some European ones promote the discussion of trade liberalization among ASEM countries. For these countries, a revitalization of the economic pillar would need to start with the convening of an ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting (EMM), the last one of which took place in 2003.[8] The European Commission, in addition to countries such as Japan and Australia, are rather of the opinion that it is impossible to agree on trade-related generalities with 53 partners, or that it is difficult to avoid overlap with ongoing bilateral negotiations. 2017 may finally mark a revival of the economic pillar. Likely prompted by the global trade slowdown and the conspicuous rise of protectionism, the 7th EMM will take place in September 2017 in Seoul.

In recent years, the idea that ASEM should include more concrete action programs in support of the dialogue has been building up momentum. At the Milan summit in 2014, for example, the leaders "welcomed more action-oriented cooperation" (ASEM 2014). The Ulaanbaatar Summit of 2016 as well affirmed the importance of implementing "substantial human-centered cooperation projects… creating opportunities for all and more tangible outcomes" (ASEM 2016a). High-level informal dialogue and interaction on the one hand, and tangible cooperation leading to visible results on the other, are key, mutually reinforcing processes. As a first step to implement this, the summit in Mongolia in July 2016 issued the "Ulaanbaatar Declaration on Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) into the Third Decade." The document constitutes a political agreement on dialogue as well as cooperation in fields where ASEM can function as a "political catalyst" and where it has added value. While it lists an extensive number of examples of such fields, it also emphasizes that "all cooperation initiatives and mechanisms should encourage people's

engagement, especially that of youth and businesses, in ASEM's activities." It furthermore aims to foster connectivity in all its dimensions, and mainstream it into all ASEM cooperation frameworks.

6 Conclusions

To conclude, when looking back on ASEM two first decades, it is clear that the forum has evolved strongly in terms of issue areas it deals with. A marked shift has taken place, from an initial focus on trade and economy coupled rooted in a political non-interventionist approach, to a gradual securitization process and an increased emphasis on political dialogue. The global financial crisis returned trade and economy to the table, but with a higher emphasis on financial mechanisms and sustainable development. In the context of NTS issues, the focus of the dialogue has come to lie more on societies, communities, and people. The summit in Mongolia of 2016 officially turned the promotion of connectivity into ASEM's main mission, in an effort to tie together political linkages, trade, economy, infrastructure development, sustainable development, and people-to-people exchanges.

As for institutional design, ASEM chose a comprehensive approach, a focus on dialogue rather than on cooperation, an open approach to membership, informality, and the involvement of multiple stakeholder groups as tools to bring the countries from both regions closer together. ASEM's institutional design can be explained from both the logic of consequences (rationalism) and the logic of appropriateness (constructivism). ASEM dialogue, while often limiting itself to the lowest common denominator, serves as a rationalizing agent and aims to have a complementary function to other global fora.

Structurally ASEM is still grounded in a region-to-region setup, but it cannot be denied that the importance of interregionalism has declined, both at the global level and at ASEM's microlevel. In view of the development in terms of membership, the forum should now be seen as an example of "complex interregionalism" (Hardacre and Smith 2014), or of a transregional institution.

Two key interlinked discussions will determine ASEM's future path. The first pertains to the extent to which ASEM can remain an informal construction, in view of the tensions with formal interaction and creeping institutionalization. The second relates to the degree to which ASEM can keep its focus on dialogue, in view of the increasing calls for more action-oriented cooperation.

Notes

1. For a more detailed outline of ASEM's early history and the roles played by both France and Germany, see Gaens (2008, pp. 9–28).
2. The Czech Republic, Switzerland, Croatia, and Latvia were represented at presidential level, and Finland, Estonia, Netherlands, Slovenia, Germany, Luxembourg, Lithuania, Slovakia, Romania, Bulgaria, Cyprus, Malta, and Poland sent their Prime Ministers.
3. Sweden, Denmark, Spain, Portugal, Ireland, Norway, Austria, Italy, France, Belgium, Greece and Hungary.
4. The Presidents of Mongolia, Myanmar, and South Korea attended. China, Kazakhstan, Russia, Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Singapore, Thailand, Bangladesh, and Japan were represented by Prime Ministers. Vice Presidents: India and Indonesia. Deputy Prime Minister: Malaysia. Foreign Ministers: Philippines, New Zealand. Deputy Foreign Minister: Australia. Special Envoys: Pakistan and Brunei. See ASEM (2016b).
5. The ASEM4 summit in Copenhagen (2002) produced the shortest Chair's Statement with around 1800 words, while the eighth summit in Brussels (2010) resulted in the longest document (approximately 7600 words).
6. See Chap. 7 for a more detailed analysis of ASEM's visibility-promoting efforts.
7. Also on 15 July, the first day of the summit, a failed coup d'état attempt took place in Turkey, to an extent overshadowing the summit. The pro-Brexit vote of 23 June had earlier cast clouds over the Europe-Asia gathering.
8. In 2005 a "High Level Meeting within the Framework of the ASEM Economic Ministers' Meeting" did take place.

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CHAPTER 3

ASEM: Partnership for Greater Growth?

Gauri Khandekar

1 Introduction

Over the past two decades, it has become clear that, while Europe-Asia bilateral commercial ties have leapfrogged, ASEM's emphasis on its second pillar—economy—and its role in enhancing Europe-Asia economic relations has conversely weakened considerably. This chapter first addresses the limited progress made in ASEM's pillar two: economic cooperation. One of the main causes behind the perceived paucity of progress in the economic pillar is that the level of engagement and output that has ensued under this pillar has drastically lost pace as compared to its initial years. In its inaugural period, a number of ambitious, fundamental, and strategic initiatives were generated under ASEM pillar two. Over the past decade, and today, in particular, there have been no such remarkable initiatives. The contrast between ASEM's economic pillar after 2 years of the ASEM process and the same after twenty has further reinforced the impression that the economic pillar is no longer working.

Yet, Europe and Asia are each other's largest external trading partners with two-way trade in goods standing at €1.37 trillion in 2012 (D'Ambrogio 2014). At first glance, this figure lends the image that

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ASEM seems to be functioning well, especially in the economic realm. Principally, however, there is a disconnect, or rather no strong co-relation between, Europe-Asia trade relations and the role of ASEM. Europe-Asia intercontinental trade is largely a bilateral effort of individual countries and not a direct or even indirect consequence of ASEM. Furthermore, ASEM members together represent nearly 60% of the world's GDP, 62% of global trade, and 62% of the world's population. The economic potential that both regions represent for each other is vast but remains largely untapped. ASEM has in fact proved largely ineffectual in its role as a platform in extracting this potential.

This chapter subsequently explains the economics behind the numbers. It discusses the current state of economic affairs between Europe and Asia, the shift in geoeconomic patterns in Asia, and demonstrates why the current level of bilateral trade between European and Asian countries is far from optimal. The final section will look at possible new directions and shifts in focus that could help ASEM deliver better in its third decade.

2 The Golden Years—Momentum and Tangibility

In the period immediately following its inception in 1996, the focus on economy within ASEM was extremely strong as well as tangible, backed by political will, and driven by the initial enthusiasm to deliver. One of ASEM's biggest and most potent initiatives came about in June 1998, when ASEM formally established an Asian Financial Crisis Response Trust Fund to assist seven East Asian nations affected by the Asian financial crisis which began in July 1997. The response fund would not only provide technical advice and training on financial sector and social policy reforms (the fund was divided into a ratio of 52:48 in social sector programs and financial and corporate sector programs), but would initially also intervene to help troubled financial institutions (World Bank 2003). This swift response of ASEM proved to be an integral and positive step toward the economic recovery of the East Asian region.

A number of other economy-focused initiatives too were rapidly launched by ASEM in this inception period. Following the first ASEM summit in March 1996 held in Bangkok, Thailand, where European and Asian leaders called for the creation of a platform to foster business links between both regions, the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) was launched in Paris, France, in October 1996, barely six months later.

At the first ASEM Senior Officials' meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI) held in Brussels on 25 July 1996, ASEM launched a trade facilitation action plan (TFAP) with the intention of reducing non-tariff barriers (NTBs) between both regions as well as promoting trade opportunities. The TFAP is followed on a voluntary basis with a certain degree of coercion in the form of peer pressure and public naming and shaming (TFAP reports are published publically and made available to the Asia-Europe Business Forum). As such, ASEM chooses to perform the role of a forum for information sharing and confidence building, rather than for negotiations. The TFAP is broadly aimed at complementing work carried out in bilateral and multilateral fora especially the World Trade Organization (WTO).

Originally called for in the first ASEM Summit, the ASEM Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) was actually derived in large parts from numerous quotes found in the Summit's Chairman's Statement (ASEM 1997). A draft IPAP was reviewed and finalized expeditiously at the second meeting of the ASEM Government and Private Sector Working-Group held in Luxembourg on 28–29 July 1997. At a time when investment flows between Europe and Asia were low, especially given that Asian investments into Europe were a relatively new phenomenon (barring of course Japan and to a lesser extent South Korea), the IPAP was yet another rapid endeavor of ASEM designed to boost growth by promoting two-way investments between Europe and Asia, resolving investment-related issues, and creating a business/government interface mechanism. Regular meetings between ASEM Economic and Finance ministers also took place during the first decade of ASEM ensuring that the focus on economy was maintained.

ASEM is largely an informal process of dialogue and cooperation. Yet, of the three pillars of ASEM activity, the second pillar is the one that has been most visible in terms of activities, follow-ups, and meetings. A study published in June 2014 (Pelkmans and Hu 2014) reported that 100 activities were conducted under the second pillar; almost double the 54 activities carried out under the third pillar and the 16 performed under the first pillar. The second pillar also registered 22 non-follow-up ASEM activities out of a total of 36 (11 in pillar 3 and 3 in pillar 1). Moreover, of ASEM's 28 "regular", largely annual meetings, the majority takes place under the second pillar (for instance, of the 7 ministerials, 5 fall under pillar 2: finance, economic, transport, environment, labor, and employment).

In truth, however, the economic pillar is in need of revitalization. Meetings have slowly become infrequent, and more essentially, lack tangible outputs. Although ASEM Ministers of Finance have met regularly since 1997, ASEM Ministers of Economy have not met since the last Economic Ministers Meeting (EMM) took place in Dalian, China, in 2003 (Gaens 2008).[1] This is despite the eruption of the global economic and financial as well as European debt crises in 2008 and the persisting slowdown in Europe. There has, for instance, been no program issued on lessons learned from the Asian financial crisis, for which ASEM could have served as the premier forum. Of the many dialogues and initiatives that do take place, it is worth questioning whether they are really effective. Moreover, the lack of sufficient progress in commercial ties between Europe and Asia, as well as the paucity of economic cooperation, bilaterally as well as multilaterally, is a frequent target of criticism. Overall however, the dialogue on trade and economy needs a new direction.

3 Behind the Figures and Beyond

Today, ASEM members together constitute around 62% of global trade, and an equal percentage of the world's population. Two-way trade in goods between the two regions reached €1.37 trillion in 2012 (D'Ambrogio 2014). Exports from the 28 member states of the EU, Norway, and Switzerland to the non-EU/EFTA ASEM countries amounted to €562 billion in 2012 while imports reached €809 billion. Europe, and the EU in particular, runs a large deficit in trade with Asia. More than 26% of EU outward investment goes to Asia. Yet Europe and Asia are far from exploiting their full potential in bilateral commerce. Additionally, there is much behind these impressive figures that can help better understand Europe-Asia economic ties and the role played by ASEM.

Although these steadily growing trade and investment figures are not insubstantial, attributing the phenomenon of increasing interregional trade and economic connectivity to ASEM is an open question. The correlation between what is done in the context of ASEM and actual trade and investment flows is at best tangential. Bilateral trade remains very much a national prerogative and more minutely, up to businesses themselves. At the national level, individual countries facilitate trade and promote but do not force destinations to national businesses. Individual governments in third countries for instance frequently organize trade fairs. Large business delegations accompany national leaders' official visits

abroad. Economic diplomacy is a highly potent and greatly used foreign policy tool to promote bilateral commercial ties as well as steer political relations. Bilateral trade therefore depends on individual countries and the performance of their businesses. Trade between ASEM members from either continent is not uniform across the board. Not all European countries trade extensively with Asia and vice versa. It is not surprising then that just five and not all European ASEM members by far dominate trade with Asian ASEM members. These are Germany, The Netherlands, the United Kingdom, France, and Italy. The majority of external trade of most European countries still remains intra-EFTA (European Free Trade Area). Similarly on the Asian side, China, Russia, Japan, South Korea, and India dominate trade with ASEM's European partners (Table 1).

Regional organizations like the EU, ASEAN, or SAARC may play a limited role, but even that, is subject to the discretion of its member countries. The EU has by far outpaced other regional organizations as regards supranational competences in external trade. Its common market, harmonized standards, common competition policy, and uniform customs regime are important elements of trade policy prowess. In particular, since the EU Treaty of Lisbon signed in 2009, the EU has the sole competence to enter into trade and investment agreements with third countries on behalf of its member states. No EU member state can sign an individual trade or investment agreement with a third country. But even the EU largely fails to promote trade between its member states and Asian countries. Despite having dedicated embassies in various Asian countries, the EU can actually do little to actually stimulate trade carried out by its member states. For an intergovernmental platform like ASEM, which lacks any legal basis, playing a crucial role in trade promotion is a rather remote yet untapped possibility.

To prove that ASEM plays no role in Europe-Asia trade, it is sufficient to look at recent trade figures between European and Asian countries. Although trade between both continents has grown substantially over the past two decades in congruence with economic growth in Asia, bilateral merchandise trade over the past few years has been either steadily declining, declined significantly in 2012 while picking up slightly in 2013 or growing at a slower pace than previous years. Table 2 displays this trend. However, the issue has not been raised at any ASEM summit as yet.

The same is true for Norway and Switzerland's trade with Asian ASEM members. Trade has fallen with the exception of a few countries.

Table 1 Top five trading nations within ASEM (2013, figures in millions of €)

European (with Asian ASEM members)					*Asian (with European ASEM members)*				
Rank	*Country*	*Imports*	*Exports*	*Total*	*Rank*	*Country*	*Imports*	*Exports*	*Total*
1	Germany	177,422	148,855	326,277	1	China	148,298	280,097	428,395
2	Netherlands	35,821	122,261	158,082	2	Russia	119,768	205,864	325,632
3	United Kingdom	52,165	88,542	140,707	3	Japan	54,084	56,565	110,649
4	France	55,394	57,537	112,931	4	South Korea	39,969	35,841	75,810
5	Italy	45,152	60,880	106,032	5	India	35,874	36,809	72,683

Table 2 Bilateral merchandise trade of Asian countries with the EU (figures in millions of €)

Asian ASEM countries	*Trade with the EU*						
	2008	*2009*	*2010*	*2011*	*2012*	*2013*	*2014*
Australia	40,491	31,876	39,433	46,132	48,457	42,224	38,765
Bangladesh	6551	6882	8688	10,789	11,434	12,557	14,327
Brunei	180	186	337	570	1167	1288	478
Burma	291	248	245	319	404	567	886
Cambodia	886	906	1166	1697	2294	2760	3317
China	327,403	297,695	397,385	431,444	436,260	428,243	467,309
India	60,988	53,003	68,354	80,509	76,068	72,665	72,520
Indonesia	19,543	17,013	20,389	23,729	25,270	24,118	23,885
Japan	118,865	94,418	111,286	119,657	120,643	110,618	107,852
Lao's	202	230	272	421	478	371	406
Malaysia	28,998	24,360	30,342	31,510	33,336	32,647	33,668
Mongolia	270	191	342	485	504	579	408
New Zealand	5918	4826	5501	6682	6782	7169	7885
Pakistan	7549	6953	7610	8429	8254	8377	9587
Philippines	9565	6944	9381	10,410	9968	10,913	12,437
Russia	285,416	185,266	248,383	309,915	338,566	326,418	284,583
Singapore	38,424	35,034	43,356	46,495	51,973	46,753	44,822
South Korea	65,235	54,071	67,496	68,826	75,829	75,748	82,125
Thailand	26,555	22,048	27,859	29,995	31,818	32,044	30,978
Vietnam	12,012	11,617	14,308	18,186	23,991	27,032	28,252

While the EU has for years been the top trading partner for the vast majority of Asian countries, over the years, its position has been eroded, slipping lower down the ranks (see Table 3). In Asia the EU has been replaced by China in most cases, other Asian countries led by Japan or

Table 3 Top 5 trading partners of Asian countries

ASEM Asian members	*Top 5 Trading partners (2014) figures in millions of Euros*				
	1	*2*	*3*	*4*	*5*
Bangladesh	EU 28 (€10,790)	China (€5665)	India (€4385)	USA (€3526)	Singapore (€1609)
Brunei	Japan (€3449)	Singapore (€1901)	China (€1497)	South Korea (€1435)	EU 28 (€1382)
Burma	China (€8158)	Thailand (€5950)	Singapore (€2021)	India (€1525)	Japan (€1428)
Cambodia	China (€2117)	USA (€2446)	EU 28 (€2115)	Hong Kong (€1,1729)	Thailand (€1020)
China	EU 28 (€428,648)	USA (€395,664)	Hong Kong (€307,570)	Japan (€239,346)	South Korea (€210,150)
India	EU 25 (€78,925)	China (€50,585)	United Arab, E, (€49,974)	USA (€47,689)	Saudi Arabia (€36,712)
Indonesia	USA (€515,568)	China (€467,309)	Russia (€285,140)	Switzerland (€236,902)	Norway (€ 134,116)
Japan	China (€237,587)	USA (€158,222)	EU 28 (€115,137)	South Korea (€70,809)	Australia (€52,085)
Laos	Thailand (€4064)	China (€2163)	Vietnam (€852)	EU 28 (€339)	Japan (€177)
Malaysia	China (€49,422)	Singapore (€44,028)	Japan (€33,147)	EU 28 (€33,072)	Thailand (€19,136)
Mongolia	China (€4504)	Russia (€1355)	EU 28 (€611)	South Korea (€356)	Japan (€266)
Pakistan	China (€11,527)	EU 28 (€8,149)	United Arab, E (€6717)	Saudi Arabia (€5432)	USA (€3959)
Philippines	Japan (€13,160)	China (€11,824)	USA (€11,648)	EU 28 (€10,011)	Singapore (€6644)
Singapore	China (€70,718)	Malaysia (€79,734)	EU 28 (€60,198)	USA (€48,260)	Indonesia (€45,947)
South Korea	China (€175,540)	EU 28 (€80,732)	USA (€79,820)	Japan (€72,611)	Saudi Arabia (€35,651)
Thailand	USA (€515,568)	China (€467,309)	Russia (€285,140)	Switzerland (€236,902)	Norway (€134,116)
Vietnam	China (€38,504)	EU 28 (€25,905)	USA (€22,315)	South Korea (€20,956)	Japan (€19,372)

South Korea or the United States which follows a renewed economic engagement strategy with Asia following the launch of its Asia rebalance strategy in 2011.

The trend is particularly visible in the case of ASEAN (Fig. 1).

2012	1	2	3	4	5
Brunei	Japan	ASEAN	South Korea	China	EU
Cambodia	ASEAN	China	US	EU	Japan
Indonesia	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	South Korea
Lao PDR	ASEAN	China	EU	Japan	South Korea
Malaysia	ASEAN	China	Japan	EU	US
Myanmar	ASEAN	China	Japan	India	South Korea
Philippines	ASEAN	Japan	US	China	EU
Singapore	ASEAN	EU	China	US	Japan
Thailand	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	US
Vietnam	China	ASEAN	EU	Japan	US

2011	1	2	3	4	5
Brunei	Japan	ASEAN	South Korea	Australia	India
Cambodia	ASEAN	US	China	EU	Japan
Indonesia	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	South Korea
Lao PDR	ASEAN	Australia	China	EU	Japan
Malaysia	ASEAN	China	Japan	EU	US
Myanmar	ASEAN	China	India	Japan	South Korea
Philippines	ASEAN	Japan	US	China	EU
Singapore	ASEAN	EU	China	US	Japan
Thailand	ASEAN	Japan	EU	US	South Korea
Vietnam	China	ASEAN	EU	Japan	US

2010	1	2	3	4	5
Brunei	Japan	ASEAN	South Korea	Australia	China
Cambodia	ASEAN	US	China	EU	Canada
Indonesia	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	US
Lao PDR	ASEAN	US	China	Australia	EU
Malaysia	ASEAN	China	Japan	EU	US
Myanmar	ASEAN	China	India	Japan	South Korea
Philippines	ASEAN	Japan	US	EU	China
Singapore	ASEAN	EU	China	US	Japan
Thailand	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	US
Vietnam	China	ASEAN	US	EU	Japan

2009	1	2	3	4	5
Brunei	Japan	ASEAN	South Korea	India	Australia
Cambodia	ASEAN	US	China	EU	Canada
Indonesia	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	US
Lao PDR	ASEAN	China	Australia	EU	Japan
Malaysia	ASEAN	China	EU	US	Japan
Myanmar	ASEAN	China	India	Japan	South Korea
Philippines	ASEAN	Japan	US	EU	South Korea
Singapore	ASEAN	EU	China	US	Japan
Thailand	ASEAN	Japan	China	US	EU
Vietnam	China	ASEAN	EU	US	Japan

2008	1	2	3	4	5
Brunei	Japan	ASEAN	Australia	South Korea	EU
Cambodia	US	ASEAN	China	EU	Canada
Indonesia	ASEAN	Japan	China	EU	South Korea
Lao PDR	ASEAN	China	Japan	Australia	South Korea
Malaysia	ASEAN	US	EU	China	South Korea
Myanmar	ASEAN	China	India	Japan	South Korea
Philippines	ASEAN	US	Japan	EU	China
Singapore	ASEAN	EU	China	US	Japan
Thailand	ASEAN	Japan	EU	China	US
Vietnam	China	ASEAN	Japan	US	South Korea

Fig. 1 Top 5 trading partners for ASEAN countries

There are two key reasons for this trend. The first reason is the growth in intra-regional trade in Asia. The Asian economy is fueled by no less than four economic giants, namely China, India, Japan, and South Korea, and a second tier of fast-growing economies in South East Asia. As such, intra-regional trade in Asia has made it the fastest growing trade corridor in the world—intra-Asian trade stood at 54.1% in 2013 compared to the EU's institutionalized version of 67.2% (2012) (Asian Development Bank 2014). At 14% per year, intra-regional trade has grown faster than Asia's trade with either the EU or the rest of the world (11%).

Second, there has been an impressive proliferation of FTAs in the region and globally in light of the failure to liberalize trade under the WTO framework. There are in Asia currently around 215 FTAs, almost double the 124 FTAs a decade ago, according to the Asian Development Bank's (ADB) Asia Regional Integration Centre, of which 150 are exclusively intra-regional (Asia Regional Integration Centre 2016). Major plurilateral FTAs in the region include the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP)[2] signed in 2015, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)[3] under negotiations, and the China-Japan-South Korea trilateral FTA also under negotiations, among others (Fig. 2).

With Asia, the EU has entered into a series of FTAs. Beyond the EU-South Korea FTA which is the most comprehensive of EU FTAs in place so far, the EU has ongoing FTA negotiations with a number of

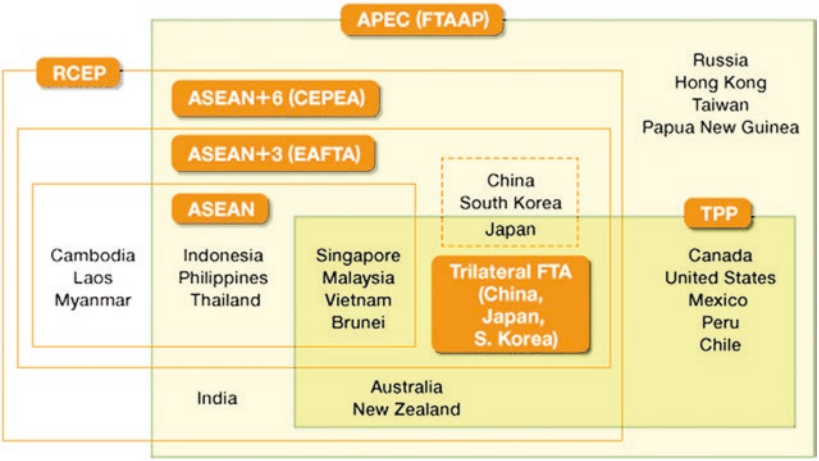

Fig. 2 Main FTAs in Asia

other Asian countries: India (2007), Malaysia (2010), Vietnam (2012), Thailand (2013), Japan (2013), and New Zealand (2015) as well as an investment agreement talks with China. Scoping exercises are also ongoing with the Philippines, Brunei, and Indonesia. On 20 September 2013, the European Union (EU) and Singapore initialed a comprehensive bilateral free trade agreement (FTA), under negotiation since March 2010.

Although the EU is currently negotiating a number of FTAs across Asia, only one is actually operational—the EU-South Korea FTA. The EU-Singapore FTA has still not entered into force, as it currently remains mired in an institutional deadlock between the European Commission (EC) and the Council over a dispute concerning the implementation of the Treaty of Lisbon. The agreement can only become functional pending a ruling over the dispute from the European Court of Justice (ECJ) in the indefinite future and provided both the EC and the Council consider the matter resolved. The EU-Singapore FTA is crucial for EU-ASEAN relations. Indeed, the EU-Singapore FTA is the first agreement that needs to be in place in order to build a bloc-to-bloc FTA between the EU and ASEAN. Being the most advanced FTA between the EU and ASEAN member countries; it would be the one to set the tone and ambition of any region-to-region FTA between the EU and ASEAN (Khandekar 2013).

There are eight key problems in boosting EU-Asia trade. The first of these has been the lack of a trade strategy in the EU. In 2007, the EU and ASEAN had initiated negotiations on a region-to-region FTA, which was shelved seven rounds later in 2009, primarily over human rights concerns regarding Myanmar (Khandekar 2013). A Joint Communication of the EU adopted on 19 May 2015, titled "The EU and ASEAN: a partnership with a strategic purpose", recently called for the EU to pick up anew its project of an ambitious region-to-region FTA "building on bilateral agreements between the EU and ASEAN Member States (European Commission 2015). Second, the EU was late to wake up to the trend of bilateral FTAs as a way of sidestepping the impasse at the WTO. Third, the EU has been pursuing extremely ambitious FTAs modeled along the far-reaching EU-South Korea FTA, regardless of the economic realities of the country it is negotiating with like India or Vietnam. Fourth, there has been a lack of urgency on the part of the EU in negotiating FTAs. Most FTA or investment agreement negotiations have lasted a minimum of 5 years, and up to a decade in the case of India. Asia, on the other hand races to conclude FTAs at record speed.

Six, procedures in the EU have further delayed the process. At the beginning, the EU insisted on signing a partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA)—a political agreement that included normative clauses—before beginning FTA negotiations. Asian countries saw these PCAs as problematic since they allowed the EU to suspend trade relations for undefined conditions (human rights cases, environmental issues, and so on). Moreover, the PCAs took years to negotiate and then ratify by all EU member states, the European Parliament and the third country. FTAs too are subject to ratification processes post signature before they become operational. These take a further 2 years at minimum since they also undergo translations procedures into all 28 EU languages and legal scrubbing. Seven, since the treaty of Lisbon, the European Parliament has gained new competences in matters of external trade, in particular, the ability to reject FTAs. Although EU trade agreements have included human rights clauses since the early 1990s, the new powers of the European Parliament ensure that the agreement will not pass through It also discusses the Parliament's ability if these agreements fail to contain the necessary human rights clauses (Lorand 2014). This has a bearing on the other negotiating party, which may not want to be subject to the procedure. And finally, despite being a part of the EFTA and Switzerland's membership of Schengen, FTAs negotiated by the EU are not applied to either Norway or Switzerland.

4 Asian FTAs and the WTO

Both, the proliferation and scope of FTAs in Asia is impressive. Beyond the bilateral FTAs, there are major plurilateral FTAs in the region include the Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP) signed on October 4, 2015, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) under negotiations, and the China-Japan-South Korea trilateral FTA also under negotiations, among others. The TPP in particular is not restricted as such and could eventually expand to embrace all ASEAN countries. TPP members, many of whom are represented in the G20, together constitute one third of global trade and almost 40% of global gross domestic product. Once ratified by all, the TPP could boost member countries' GDP's by 1.1% on average by 2030, augment member countries' trade by 11% by 2030 (World Bank 2016), generate global income benefits of $223 billion a year by 2025, while advancing annual world exports by $305 billion. RCEP represents 49% of global, 30% of world GDP,

29% of world trade and 26% of global FDI inflows (Ganeshan 2013). And according to Ganeshan Wignaraja, Director of Research at the Asian Development Bank Institute, Tokyo, RCEP could increase global economy income gains by US$260–644 billion in a decade once signed and ratified (Ganeshan 2013). Countries in the region too hope to ultimately transform these mega plurilateral FTAs—the TPP and RCEP—into a Free Trade Area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP). According to a 2014 study, income gains from FTAAP could be to the tune of $2 trillion by 2025—eight times that of the TPP and thrice those of RCEP (Petri et al. 2014). Currently however, both the TPP and RCEP will not only further spur intra-regional trade and Asian trade with the Pacific Rim countries (which include the United States, Canada, and Mexico in addition to certain Latin American countries), but could create important trade divergences from transatlantic trade toward the Asia Pacific.

In addition, the TPP—an initiative of the United States, which is a major European competitor in the region aside from China—is fast proliferating US commercial regulations throughout the region and not the EU's. This phenomenon, coupled with the fact that Europe remains largely absent from the region's free trade architecture, will inevitably make European trade with the region more difficult. It is essential to mention that as of December 2016, the TPP has come under uncertainty given that US President-elect Donald Trump has vowed to issue on his first day in office a note of intent to withdraw the United States from the TPP. However, it remains unclear whether the United States will indeed withdraw from an accord that firmly entrenches US economic interests in an area of global growth, or whether Donald Trump might choose to renegotiate parts of the agreement or the TPP in its entirety as has promised to do so during his electoral campaign.

For many years, a number of EU officials have dismissed the seriousness of the trend in Asian FTAs calling the FTAs non-comprehensive and writing off their ability to really work. Many had even rejected the possibility of the TPP negotiations being concluded at all. However, trade patterns in Asia show that not only are Asian FTAs significantly boosting bilateral trade but that Asian countries are making a conscious effort to work toward disentangling the so-called "Noodle Bowl of Asian FTAs" in favor of a regional free trade area. Increasingly trade agreements in the region are multilayered and contain more and more WTO-plus elements. Various studies have shown that "many FTAs in the region cover areas not covered or covered poorly by WTO arrangements, and are thus

seen as elements of the WTO-plus formula. Included are FTAs dealing with liberalization of trade in services, investment, standards, intellectual property rights, capacity building, economic cooperation, and labor mobility" (Zhang and Shen 2011). In a study by the East West Centre conducted by Kawai and Wignaraja examining 69 concluded FTAs in the region, "a review of the criteria covering the four 'Singapore issues' (competition, intellectual property, investment, and public procurement) shows that 23% had comprehensive 'WTO-plus' coverage, another 54% had partial WTO-plus coverage, and 23% were goods-and-services agreements only" (Kawai and Wignaraja 2013) (Fig. 3).

In Asia, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, South Korea, and Singapore strongly favor a WTO-plus approach FTAs, followed increasingly by China, India Thailand and Malaysia, which lean toward the WTO-plus approach. Poorer economies in the region like Cambodia, Vietnam and Laos, including Indonesia and The Philippines, partly follow the WTO-plus approach. It is furthermore interesting to note that agreements between developing Asian countries and developed Asian countries generally follow a WTO-plus format, and that existing FTAs in Asia are

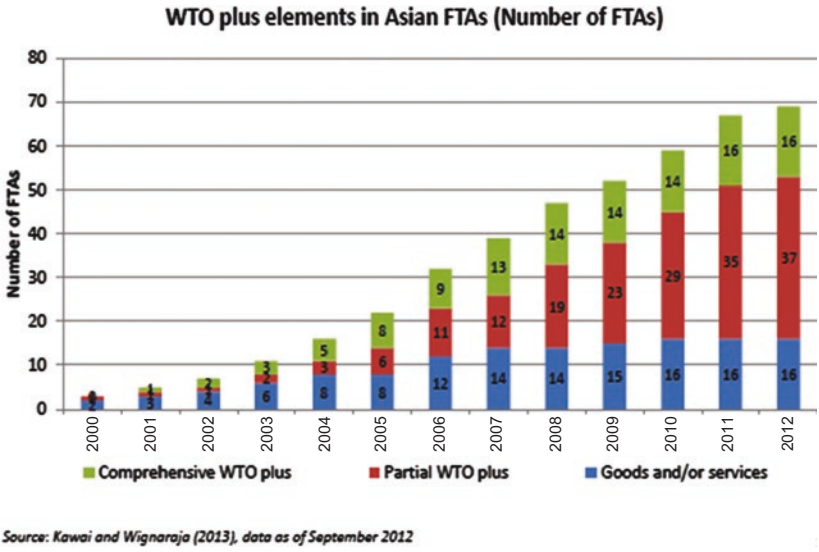

Fig. 3 WTO-plus elements in Asian FTAs

slowly being expanded to include more WTO-plus elements (Kawai et al. 2010). A number of Asian FTAs are living documents, which are ameliorated with time post-conclusion. While this approach has been dismissed by the EU, it is nonetheless proving effective in the context of Asia and its diverse economies.

Moreover, Asian FTAs are effective. They have boosted trade among partners considerably—some by up to 936% as in the case of the India-Sri Lanka FTA or 486% in the case of the Singapore-New Zealand FTA. Table 4 provides empirical evidence of the strength of various Asian FTAs to boost trade. On the contrary, the Japan-Switzerland and EU-South Korea FTAs have registered negative growths.

The current trend in Asia is to move toward supplementary FTAs in services trade and investments—an arguably more practical approach than the EU's inclusive approach of a comprehensive FTA covering trade, investments, services, property rights, procurement and a host of other sectors. According to a (2013) study by Kawai and Wignaraja in which they reviewed 69 Asian FTAs, 41% had comprehensive GATS coverage, 21% had some coverage while 23% had little to no coverage of services trade. Of these same 69 FTAs, 23% had comprehensive WTO-plus coverage, 54% had partial coverage while only 23% had goods and services coverage only (Zhang and Shen 2011).

Usually, services agreements comprise a large number of cover areas ranging from computer and information services, telecommunications, e-commerce, engineering services, financial and insurance services, construction services, engineering services, shipping and transportation services and so on. Investment agreements include areas such as energy, transport, logistics and the like. As regional organizations, in recognition of the importance of liberalization in services trade, given that the services sector accounts for a large and growing percentage of Asian GDPs, ASEAN, and SAARC have both put in place services agreements. The ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services was signed by the ASEAN Economic Ministers (AEM) on 15 December 1995 in Bangkok, Thailand, and is based on General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT) provisions (ASEAN 2015). The SAARC Agreement on Trade in Services was signed in April 2010 and entered into force on 29 November 2012 after ratification by all SAARC Member States (SAARC Secretariat). These agreements are not limited to Asia's regional integration organizations only. For instance, in 2007, ASEAN signed a Trade in Services Agreement with China under the Framework Agreement on

Table 4 A comparison of Asian FTAs

Country/ org	*FTA partner*	*Type of FTA*	*Date signed*	*Bilateral trade (billion $US)*		*Growth %*	*Source*
			DD/MM/YYYY	*When signed*	*2014*		
ASEAN	Australia-New Zealand	Multilateral FTA	27/02/2009	49.23	70.54	43.29	ASEANStats (aggregated NZ and Australia´s figures
ASEAN	China	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement[1]	01/01/2004	105.87	318.56	200.90	ASEAN Trade database, UN Comtrade
ASEAN	India	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	01/01/2010	55.44	71.56	29.18	ASEAN Trade database
ASEAN	South Korea	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	01/06/2007	61.18	130.99	114.11	ASEAN Trade database
ASEAN	Japan	Comprehensive Economic Partnership	01/12/2008	214.40	262.42	22.40	ASEAN Trade database
India	Nepal	Treaty of Trade	06/03/2003	0.896	4.8	435.71	Nepal Rastra Bank and Trade Promotion Centre
India	Singapore	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	01/08/2005	13.00	16.70	28.46	Yearbook of Statistics, Singapore
India	Malaysia	Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement	01/07/2011	13	16	20.93	Ministry of Commerce & Industry, India
India	Japan	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement	01/08/2011	16.80	15.70	-6.55	Ministry of Commerce & Industry, India

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Country/ org	*FTA partner*	*Type of FTA*	*Date signed*	*Bilateral trade (billion $US)*		*Growth %*	*Source*
			DD/MM/YYYY	*When signed*	*2014*		
India	South Korea	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement	01/01/2010	13.6	18.2	33.82	Korea International Trade Association
India	Sri Lanka	Free Trade Agreement	15/12/2001	0.676	7	935.50	EU Commission, ITC Trademaps
India	Bhutan	Trade Agreement	29/07/2006	0.18	0.344	91.11	Royal Monetary Authority, Royal Government of Bhutan
India	Afghanistan	Preferential Trading Agreement	13/05/2003	0.142	0.686	383.10	Ministry of Commerce & Industry, India
China	Thailand	Free Trade Agreement	01/10/2003	12.7	72.6	471.65	Thai Ministry of Commerce
China	Taiwan	Economic Cooperation Framework Agreement	12/09/2010	112.88			Bureau of Foreign Trade, Taiwan
China	Singapore	Free Trade Agreement	01/01/2009	47.9	79.7	66.39	Statistics Singapore
China	Pakistan	Free Trade Agreement	01/07/2007	6.9	16	131.88	China Ministry of Commerce, Pakistan Business Council
China	Macau	Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement	01/01/2004	3.8	3.8	0	
China	Hong Kong	Closer Economic Partnership Arrangement	29/06/2003	87.4	375.8	329.98	Census and Statistics Department, Hong Kong
China	New Zealand	Free Trade Agreement	01/10/2008	7.5	14.2	89.33	New Zealand Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade
Japan	Vietnam	Economic Partnership Agreement[1]	01/10/2009	13.9	57.2	311.51	Vietnam Customs

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Country/ org	*FTA partner*	*Type of FTA*	*Date signed*	*Bilateral trade (billion $US)*		*Growth %*	*Source*
			DD/MM/YYYY	*When signed*	*2014*		
Japan	Thailand	Economic Partnership Agreement	01/11/2007	43.9	53.2	21.185	Japan External Trade Organization
Japan	Switzerland	Economic Partnership Agreement	01/09/2009	12.6	10.5	-16.67	Swiss National Bank
Japan	Singapore	Economic Agreement for a New-Age Partnership	30/11/2002	12.9	29	124.81	Statistics Singapore
Japan	Philippines	Economic Partnership Agreement	11/12/2008	15	20	33.33	Department of Trade and Industry, Philippines
Japan	Malaysia	Economic Partnership Agreement	13/07/2006	32.5	43.2	32.92	Stats APEC
Japan	Indonesia	Economic Partnership Agreement	01/07/2008	35.6	40.4	13.48	Stats APEC
Japan	Brunei	Free Trade Agreement	31/07/2008	4.7	4.1	-12.77	Stats APEC
South Korea	United States	Free Trade Agreement	15/03/2012	102.5	116.1	13.27	Stats APEC
South Korea	Turkey	Free Trade Agreement	01/05/2013	6.3	7.3	15.87	Turkish Statistical Institute
South Korea	Singapore	Free Trade Agreement	02/03/2006	15.4	35.2	128.57	Korea International Trade Association
South Korea	European Union	Free Trade Agreement	01/07/2011	139.64	139.32	-0.23	Korea International Trade Association
Australia	United States	Free Trade Agreement	01/01/2005	23.6	34.1	44.49	Stats APEC
Australia	Thailand	Free Trade Agreement	01/01/2005	6.82	14.5	112.61	Stats APEC

(continued)

Table 4 (continued)

Country/ org	*FTA partner*	*Type of FTA*	*Date signed*	*Bilateral trade (billion $US)*		*Growth %*	*Source*
			DD/MM/YYYY	*When signed*	*2014*		
Australia	Singapore	Free Trade Agreement	28/07/2003	5.2	19	265.38	Stats APEC
Australia	Papua New Guinea	Trade and Commercial Region	20/09/1991	1.25	5.3	324	Stats APEC
Australia	Malaysia	Free Trade Agreement	01/01/2013	13.3	15.5	16.54	Stats APEC
Australia	New Zealand	Closer Economic Relation Trade Agreement	28/03/1983		14.3		Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australia
New Zealand	Thailand	Closer Economic Partnership Agreement	01/07/2005	0.907	2.1	131.53	Stats APEC
New Zealand	Singapore	Closer Economic Partnership	01/01/2001	0.427	2.5	485.48	Stats APEC
New Zealand	Hong Kong	Closer Economic Partnership Agreement	01/01/2011	0.642	0.716	11.53	Stats APEC
New Zealand	Malaysia	Free Trade Agreement	01/08/2010	1.63	2.8	71.78	Stats APEC
Pakistan	Sri Lanka	Free Trade Agreement	12/06/2005	0.212	0.329	55.19	Department of Commerce, Sri Lanka
Pakistan	Mauritius	Preferential Trade Agreement	30/11/2007	36.1	50.9	41	Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Commerce
Pakistan	Malaysia	Closer Economic Partnership Agreement	01/01/2008	1.8	1.5	-16.67	Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Commerce

Comprehensive Economic Co-operation, which provides for progressive liberalization at successive rounds of negotiations to negotiate further packages of commitments (ASEAN 2011). In September 2015, ASEAN and India signed an FTA in services and investment.

5 What Role for ASEM?

ASEM as the sole and significantly large platform on Europe-Asia relations has for a key task, the revival of interregional trade and economic ties. There are two principal ways in which ASEM could achieve this goal. First, ASEM members must actively work together to revive multilateral negotiations on trade liberalization under the WTO. ASEM members together represent a third of the WTO's total membership. Their collective weight could contribute to the swift conclusion of the Doha Development Agenda (DDA), the latest round of WTO trade negotiations, which began in November 2001, and aims to lower global trade barriers facilitating global trade. There is still much work to be done before DDA can be concluded. Finding an agreement within ASEM first on the DDA could significantly boost the possibility of the round's conclusion thereby reducing trade inequalities, disentangling the spaghetti bowl effect of complex and numerous FTAs, and advancing global trade and investment. Moreover, the EU, Japan, China, and India are four of the seven key countries (which include the United States, Brazil, and South Africa) that are largely holding up negotiations. India and China alone bear monumental weight. Not only do they lead a large group of developing countries resisting the DDA in order to secure an outcome which does justice to their economic challenges, but also enjoy a close equation with Brazil and South Africa under the BRICS banner (an informal collaboration platform for the group of countries which includes Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa). Finding agreement between these four countries itself could help pave the way to a successful conclusion of the DDA.

However, the TFAP and IPAP are two decades old and in need of an overhaul vis-à-vis new developments and elements which have taken place since the DDA began, such as the Bali Package (addressing a small portion of the DDA program specific to bureaucratic "red tape"), the Trade Facilitation Agreement (TFA) (which simplifies the movement, release and clearance of goods, including goods in transit), the Nairobi Package (which pertains to agriculture, cotton and issues related to

least-developed countries (LDCs)), and so on. Both cross border trade and investment are in need of restructuration and modernization especially with the global proliferation of e-commerce amidst the deficiency of contemporary rules and regulation which regulate, foster the growth of, and address challenges posed by this trend. There is a clear need for more direction on services, intellectual property, innovation, global value chains, and SMEs, which could be provided by the TFAP and IPAP. Services and global value chains in particular have emerged as the major drivers of global economic growth and thus a dominant feature of the world economy (ASEM 2016). TFAP and IPAP thus need new, concrete, yet abridged action plans set against meticulous timelines.

While the TFAP and IPAP are certainly small yet significant steps toward facilitating dialogue on issues relating to the WTO, ASEM as a platform holds the potential to achieve much more. While ASEM has entered its third decade and seeks to reinvent for itself a more strategic function, members could also consider launching an ASEM negotiating table on the DDA itself. Were ASEM members to find a common agreement on the DDA, not only would ASEM's strategic weight as a serious international platform be confirmed, but it would also radically boost the chances of the DDA being concluded.

There is overall a need for greater interaction within ASEM on matters of global trade and economy. Foremost, ASEM needs to maintain regularity in the pace of its various existing meeting configurations. The last ASEM Senior Officials Meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI 11) was held in 2008, almost a decade ago. In particular, the Economic Ministers Meeting (EMM), which has not taken place since 2003, needs to convene once again. Not only has the economic slowdown continued following the 2008 international financial crisis, but monumental changes have taken place in both Europe and Asia. In Asia, the chapter has detailed above the rapidly transforming economic panorama. In Europe, one of the EU's largest member states, the United Kingdom, may withdraw its EU membership following a public referendum that took place on 23 June 2016 on the question of the UK's membership to the EU resulted in a vote to leave. After a long gap, a SOMTI was scheduled to take place in Mongolia by the end of 2016 in order to prepare the EMM for 2017, to be held in South Korea (ASEM 2016). The SOMTI failed to materialize, however.

Second, ASEM could explore bolder ways of radically fostering trade while keeping pace with contemporary developments. The 1999

Asia-Europe Vision Group (AEVG) report recommended ASEM to work toward an ASEM FTA. With the recent trend of mega plurilateral FTAs, an ASEM FTA is not only plausible but also essential for Europe in particular to fall into step. All major global actors are currently leading such initiatives—the USA with the TPP, Japan with CEPEA, and China/ASEAN with RCEP, just in Asia. Although many ASEM members including Japan, Australia, and the European Commission believe that securing a trade agreement within 53 members is an unfeasible goal given that "enlargement has diluted the economic pillar, preventing a tight set of deliverables" (Gaens 2015). ASEM is the sole platform that can find synergies between its members to address concerns relating to weak demand and high unemployment in member economies, strengthen regional and interregional connectivity for more efficient flow of goods, services, capital and people, and narrowing developmental gaps (ASEM FMM11 2013).

Given that ASEM members together constitute around 62% of global trade, and an equal percentage of the world's population, thus representing significant markets, an ASEM FTA indeed holds the potential to boost trade and economic exchanges among members fundamentally. This would not only create shared prosperity but would also strengthen interregional ties to a level without precedence.

Indeed, such an intrepid step would no doubt galvanize ASEM's quiescent second pillar but it would also confer a "unique selling point" to the platform itself. While precise scoping exercises would be required to measure the exact benefits of the FTA, the accord could safely be estimated to induce a significant boost to member GDPs and render them more competitive, further advancing the growing economic interdependence between Asia and Europe. At the ASEM summit in Milan in 2014, gathered leaders concurred that ASEM must support tangible and result-oriented activities that benefit the people of both regions and increase ASEM's visibility and relevance. The FTA would not only address these concerns but also work toward inclusive development, help address socio-economic challenges, strengthen the private sector, and contribute to shared long-lasting prosperity. A tangible, result-oriented initiative, the FTA, would underscore the involvement of the people, growth and development. "As a first priority in addressing global matters, ASEM needs to respond to the aspirations of the people in Asia and Europe for progress, sustainable development (economic, social, and environmental) and a better quality of life" (Kapur 2015).

Lastly, the wave of urbanization sweeping the developing economies of ASEM and the economic and growth opportunities it represents for the developed economies of ASEM forms a perfect synergy between ASEM's members. Capitalizing on the potential of urban development cooperation can not only create deeply strategic relations interregionally, but will also contribute significantly to connectivity, economic growth, societal upliftment and sustainable development. For a detailed explanation of the potential of urban cooperation through ASEM, please see Chap. 7 by the same author in this volume.

6 Conclusion

Looking ahead to ASEM's third decade and beyond, economic cooperation and growth are certain aspects of ASEM that are here to stay. ASEM did indeed emphasize its second pillar since its very inception, in particular through various, tangible initiatives like the Asian Financial Crisis Response Trust Fund, the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), the ASEM Senior Officials' meeting on Trade and Investment (SOMTI), the trade facilitation action plan (TFAP), the ASEM Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP), ASEM Economic and Finance ministers, and so on.

Yet over the years, many of the initiatives have faded out or have not kept pace with contemporary developments. ASEM Ministers of Economy have not met since 2003 despite major international developments like the global financial and European debt crises of 2008 and the persisting slowdown in Europe. The TFAP and IPAP have lost the degree of ambition with which they were first launched and need to match the pace of advancement at the WTO given that despite the persistent deadlock on DDA, there have been numerous initiatives which have taken the global economic agenda forward.

There is a need for ASEM to reincarnate as a partnership based on greater economic cooperation and growth. As the chapter has demonstrated, the international economy has transformed greatly in the past decade. Emerging economies like China and India, followed by ASEAN as a grouping that leads the next wave of emerging economies, have shifted patterns of growth. The EU has receded as largest trading partner for a number of Asian countries, having been taken over by other Asian countries. The proliferation of FTAs in Asia has created a noodle bowl effect, which countries have subsequently tried to simplify with major

plurilateral FTAs. A number of Asian FTAs are either WTO-compatible or include many WTO-plus elements. At the same time, the EU has lagged behind in the race to seal FTA deals with Asian countries. The EU currently has only one operational FTA in the region—with South Korea—which too is being called into question regarding the "possible" impending British exit from the EU.

ASEM has much scope in fostering commercial and economic cooperation between its members. Setting up a WTO negotiation mini-group can be one way to significantly contribute to multilateral trade liberalization under the auspices of the WTO. Another strategy could be for ASEM to launch its own plurilateral FTA. The EU does have ongoing free trade or investment agreement negotiations with a number of Asian countries while Asia is in the process of creating a free trade area for the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP). Amalgamating both efforts could lead to a super-FTA, which would no doubt create a befitting link between two of the world's largest economically vibrant regions. The need to liberalize and enhance trade as free as possible is a necessity especially as Asia is projected to account for half of global trade by 2050. Creating a tangible and result-oriented shared economic space through institutionalized commercial interaction and enhanced connectivity will no doubt strengthen the strategic goal of economic cooperation through ASEM and concretize economic ties between Asia and Europe. The ASEM FTA would also reinforce private sector participation in ASEM by deepening business-to-business links, in particular via small- and medium-sized enterprises. An ASEM FTA must therefore be one of the immediate goals that ASEM members can adopt within the framework of ASEM cooperation. Moreover, if the TPP is indeed discarded by the United States under a Trump presidency, it makes the case for an ASEM FTA all the more compelling. In the absence of the United States—a major EU competitor in the region—the EU would stand to make gains with a broad winged interregional mega FTA. There is indeed growing disenchantment in the United States for FTAs in what is perceived as a backlash against globalization. But in Europe and Asia, there is still strong support for FTAs. The EU regularly reaffirms its commitment to ongoing bilateral FTA negotiations with Asian countries as well as the aim to have a region-to-region FTA with ASEAN. Despite delay in concluding the EU-Canada Comprehensive Economic and Trade Agreement (CETA), which was held up by a regional parliament in Belgium, the

agreement has seen the light of day. In Asia, RCEP is making progress and as demonstrated in the chapter, Asian nations have a strong penchant for FTAs given the large proliferation of bilateral FTAs.

Although the ASEM process has survived two decades of existence, there is still much need for the forum to endure simply given the strategic weight both regions bear on the global geopolitical and geoeconomic landscape. There will always be a need for dialogue and cooperation between Europe and Asia, and increasingly with Eurasia. As economics, growth and commerce are the bedrock of the international system, there is a need for ASEM to radically transform its second pillar if it has to not only survive but also thrive in its third decade and beyond. Reviving the economic pillar through tangible, result-oriented goals that fall under the global multilateral trade agenda would be the way forward for ASEM.

Notes

1. The EU canceled the EMM in 2005 in Rotterdam, the Netherlands, since it opposed the participation of a delegation from Myanmar, which was still under military rule.
2. Current TPP countries include the following Singapore, Brunei, New Zealand, Chile, USA, Australia, Peru, Vietnam, Malaysia, Mexico, Canada, and Japan.
3. Negotiating countries include the 10 members of ASEAN (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Viet Nam), India, China, Japan, South Korea, Australia, and New Zealand. ASEAN has individual FTAs with all 6 Non-ASEAN countries of RCEP.

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CHAPTER 4

ASEM and the Security Agenda: Talking the Talk but also Walking the Walk?

Axel Berkofsky

1 Introduction

This chapter deals with security, a field for which the 53-member ASEM has very limited resources and a limited mandate to tackle in an efficient and result-oriented manner. As will be sought to show below, ASEM's shortcomings regarding cooperation on security are evident, and the track record of ASEM's actual and tangible impact on regional and global security over the last two decades speaks a clear language: ASEM is not adopting European-Asian security policies but is above all concerned with talking about security in an informal and non-binding fashion, even if its official joint post-summit press statements seem to suggest that the forum is able to allow for in-depth discussions on a large number of regional and global security issues during ASEM summits. European and Asian policymakers typically counter criticism that ASEM merely talks about security as opposed to adopting concrete security policies with the argument that ASEM's mandate is not to adopt to joint European-Asian security policies but to provide European and Asian

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policymakers, scholars and civil society with a forum to discuss regional and global security in an informal fashion. Indeed, as Michael Reiterer points out, the forum's informal character is very well suited to discuss non-traditional security threats and, like the EU, it can be a very efficient instrument of soft power (Reiterer 2009, pp. 179–196). The absence of clashes of national interests or balance-of-power considerations between Europe and Asia, Reiterer argues, further favors European-Asian discussions on regional and global security in the ASEM context free from controversy. For the European Union (EU), Reiterer argues elsewhere, its involvement in and contributions to ASEM are part of what the Union refers to as its "comprehensive security policy" toward Asia dealing with traditional and non-traditional security threats (Reiterer 2014, pp. 1–21).

This chapter, however, will seek to show that, among others, ASEM's informality, an agenda overloaded with (far) too many issues and areas related to regional and global security to be efficiently dealt with by the forum, and different modes of governance in Asia and Europe have over the years undoubtedly stood in the way of the adoption and implementation of European-Asian policies countering traditional and non-traditional threats to security. Unless there are fundamental changes as to how ASEM is dealing with and tackling security—both of traditional and non-traditional nature—and unless ASEM member states decide to prioritize a limited number of issues and areas in the field of security the forum should deal with, this will most probably continue to be the case in the years ahead.

2 ASEM's Security Agenda

Although security issues have over the years occupied a prominent place in ASEM meetings and proceedings, Chair's Statements, and other documents, ASEM's track record on tangible output in this area has been rather paltry. To begin with, ASEM does not have the necessary infrastructure, instruments, or the capabilities to deal with security cooperation. Second, the vast majority of security cooperation between Europe and Asia ensues either bilaterally between individual European member states, or even the EU as a platform, and individual Asian countries or the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a regional grouping. Indeed, regional fora in Asia such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)[1] and the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting[2] (ADMM) deal

with both traditional and non-traditional security issues (Teo 2016). These fora engender concrete cooperation including the development of regional policies. In this light, any other efforts would merely be a duplication and dissipation of limited resources. Moreover, the decision itself to place security issues onto ASEM's working agenda may have arguably taken away resources from what ASEM does best—facilitate exchanges between people and cultures. It is unrealistic to assume that political leaders are able to address a large number of regional and global security issues in-depth during one ASEM summit, even if official press statements seem to suggest this. Then again, ASEM's informal character has been described as best suited to discuss non-traditional security threats between two very diverse continents. Policymakers in both Europe and Asia have indeed emphasized numerous times that ASEM's main objective is not necessarily the adoption of tangible and measurable policies but instead the attempt to bring European and Asian countries together to informally discuss issues and problems of international politics and security.

European-Asian security cooperation in the ASEM context, as Bertrand Fort has argued, is constrained by asymmetries, one of them being related to fundamental differences as regards security concerns and priorities. East Asian countries, Fort wrote in 2004, are confronted with classical security dilemmas and ongoing conflicts in Asia, while European countries are more preoccupied with the prevention of intra-state conflicts and post-conflict reconstruction.[3] Furthermore, Fort argued correctly that there is also an asymmetry as regards the involvement of Asian and European states in each other's security affairs. Europe, he stated, is more involved in Asian security than Asian countries in European security. Fort made these arguments back in 2004, but they are still valid today as important obstacles stand in the way of more concrete European-Asian security cooperation in the ASEM context (Fort 2004, pp. 355–369). Timo Kivimäki argued in 2008 that despite the above-mentioned obstacles, concrete and result-oriented European-Asian security cooperation is nonetheless possible as the joint EU-ASEAN cooperation leading to the pacification of East Timor and Aceh has demonstrated (Kivimäki 2008, pp. 49–68). Indeed, European-Asian cooperation in Indonesia has made a tangible and concrete joint contribution to peace and stability, but it should not go unmentioned that such very concrete and result-oriented EU-Asian security cooperation (which did not take place in the ASEM context but was strongly endorsed by the forum) has until today remained the exception and not the rule of European-Asian cooperation in the field of security.

Security cooperation within the ASEM framework falls under ASEM's pillar 1—political cooperation. Four loosely categorized areas can be classified under the remit of security cooperation in the political pillar—security and anti-terrorism cooperation, environmental issues, global threats, and human rights issues (Reiterer 2002). ASEM member countries have throughout ASEM's 20-year long history placed numerous issues related to traditional and non-traditional security onto the agenda of ASEM Summits, ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meetings and other Track I and Track II encounters. As Table 1 illustrates, the list of traditional and non-traditional security issues on the agenda of ASEM Summits over the past 20 years is indeed long.

The panoply of security issues and areas that have appeared on the forum's agenda from the ASEM 1 in Bangkok in 1996 to ASEM 10 in Milan in 2014 can be explained by the fact that individual ASEM member countries have obviously different priorities and preferences as to which area of security the forum should deal with. While the breadth of issues covered points to the richness of the debate that ensues within ASEM, it also and naturally limits the attention each issue receives.

In order to generate credible and result-oriented contributions to tackling security issues, ASEM could first develop a shorter priority list of security issues (Islam 2011). That would necessitate members to agree upon a limited number of issues of shared concern which simultaneously affect the largest possible number of ASEM members and which ASEM can deal with in a result-oriented manner over a determined period of time. Such a list and working agenda would require political good sense and effective decision-making to formulate and prioritize. This process would also require ASEM members to accept the fact that not all their individual priority issues would make it onto the official ASEM agenda. However, a decision to limit and streamline ASEM's priorities in security matters might not be acceptable to some ASEM member states, due to political reasons and the fact that ASEM leaders are accountable to their electorates.[4] Indeed, experience has shown that ASEM member states continue to insist on the very opposite: taking all member states' priorities into account when formulating and adopting Chair's Statements. In fact, the respective ASEM host nation typically introduces the Chair's Statement by pointing out that the statement was adopted by consensus. As a result, the Chair's Statements have over the years featured long lists of security issues which cannot—due to reasons related to the absence of resources, political will, and instruments—be the basis for the adoption

Table 1 Overview of security-related issues on the ASEM agenda

ASEM summits	*Traditional and non-traditional security issues*[a]
ASEM 1 Bangkok 1996	Nuclear non-proliferation, non-proliferation of biological and chemical weapons, and nuclear disarmament
ASEM 2 London 1998	Arms control, disarmament and non-proliferation, including the entry into force of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the opening for signature of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destructions and the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention
ASEM 3 Seoul 2000	Political and security situation in East Timor, security on the Korean Peninsula and the Middle East, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, transnational organized crime money laundering, terrorism, piracy
ASEM 4 Copenhagen 2002	Terrorism and also discussed the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, security on the Korean Peninsula, Iraq conflict
ASEM 5 Hanoi 2004	Terrorism, money laundering, arms trafficking, trafficking in human beings, the production of and trafficking in illicit drugs, and computer crimes, non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, climate change, trans-national crime
ASEM 6 Helsinki 2006	Security on the Korean Peninsula, political developments in Myanmar/Burma, Timor-Leste, Afghanistan, armed hostilities between Israel and the Hezbollah, the Israeli-Palestine conflict, the Iranian nuclear program, disarmament and the non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), money-laundering, terrorism financing and corruption, drugs-trafficking and illicit arms-trade, global health security, transnational organized crime
ASEM 7 Beijing 2008	Climate change, natural disaster responses, energy security, counter-terrorism, security on the Korean Peninsula, security in Afghanistan and the Iranian nuclear issue
ASEM 8 Brussels 2010	Piracy at sea, counter-terrorism, transnational organized crime and joint disaster prevention and disaster relief policies
ASEM 9 Vientiane 2012	Non-proliferation and disarmament, counter-terrorism, piracy at sea, food and energy security, water resources management, disaster management, mitigation and emergency response, transnational organized crime, including trafficking in persons and illicit narcotic drug trafficking, security on the Korean Peninsula, the Middle East and North Africa, Iran and Afghanistan

(continued)

Table 1 (continued)

ASEM summits	*Traditional and non-traditional security issues*[a]
ASEM 10 Milan 2014	Intra-state and cross-border violence, illegal migration and irregular movement of persons, including people-smuggling and trafficking in persons, cybercrime, terrorism, forms of radicalization and violent extremism, illegal trade in weapons and drugs, money laundering, piracy and armed robbery at sea, proliferation of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation
ASEM 11 Ulaanbaatar 2016	Terrorism, intercultural and interfaith dialogue, conflict resolution, security on the Korean Peninsula, security in Afghanistan, disarmament, arms control and non-proliferation, regional security architecture, maritime security, migration, fight against corruption

[a]The Chair's Statements and the list of security issues and areas discussed from ASEM 1 to ASEM 11 can be found on the ASEM Infoboard website at: http://www.aseminfoboard.org

of actual policies. Even if it is clear that issues and areas related to security will necessarily be addressed by ASEM, it remains—at least and naturally from the perspective of policymakers—politically important that individual priority issues make it onto agenda.

As regards most of the traditional/hard security issues placed onto the agenda over the years, ASEM is clearly not equipped with the mandate and authority to deal with the above-listed traditional/hard security issues beyond expressing verbal support for security policies formulated and adopted by individual member countries or others. These issues include nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation, arms control, illicit trade in conventional arms including small arms and light weapons (SALW) (Council of the European Union 2014). In other words, leaders at ASEM meetings "take notice," "encourage" and "support," as opposed to having actual ASEM policies on the above-mentioned security issues. ASEM leaders are undoubtedly well aware that issues such as nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation do not really belong on the forum's agenda, hence reducing the risk of conflicts between those who do and those who do not want to act on nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation beyond verbally supporting non-proliferation protocols signed by others. Therefore, ASEM's political leaders can easily agree, as they did at the Summit in Milan in 2014, that they "looked forward

to the upcoming entry into force of the Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)," that they "encouraged the States Parties to the Treaty on Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) to contribute to a successful 2015 NPT Review Conference in April–May 2015," or that they "further resolved to enhance their cooperation to address the concern caused by explosive remnants of war, including unexploded ordnance (UXO)."

The above is arguably a long shopping list of unresolved issues and problems in international politics and security. Such a list of issues, many of which are regularly discussed during ASEM meetings, do not necessarily contribute to ASEM's credibility as a forum with a clear focus on dealing with regional traditional and non-traditional security. Instead, the absence of a well-defined focus gives the impression that ASEM talks about everything without much consequence in terms of tangible policies. As mentioned above, policymakers in both Europe and Asia typically counter such criticism with the argument that discussions on the above-listed issues are not meant to result in joint policies. Instead, the argument typically goes, ASEM is a forum where opinions on the above-listed themes are presented and exchanged. While the usefulness of such exchanges is not to be dismissed per se, the relevance of such discussions is limited if they remain on the surface and do not lead to joint action. At the ASEM 2010 Summit in Brussels, it was reported that the forum's member countries were engaged bilaterally in intelligence sharing on movements of pirates off the coast of Somalia. However, it must be pointed out that intelligence sharing does not take place in the framework of ASEM and can thus hardly be attributed to ASEM or referred to as an ASEM policy. Instead, it is intelligence sharing between countries which happen to be ASEM members and which happen to be part of the same anti-piracy effort. Furthermore, the ASEM 2010 statement pointed out that ASEM member states held meetings on counter-terrorism and anti-piracy. Again, this is not an actual or "real" ASEM policy, but rather a gathering of policymakers from ASEM member countries discussing issues related to terrorism without adopting joint ASEM anti-terrorism or anti-piracy policies (Council of the European Union 2010).

3 Non-interference

A number of Asian ASEM members strongly uphold the principle of non-interference in domestic affairs and politics of a sovereign nation, not by coincidence also the guiding principle of ASEAN (Masilamani

and Petterson 2014; Jones 2009). Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs is one of the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence (in India and Nepal referred to as Panchsheel) of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) founded in 1961, which advocated a middle course for states in the developing world between the Western and Eastern Blocs in the Cold War. This is a view not embodied in European foreign policy. In the case of Europe-Asia cooperation, the principle of non-interference is raised in particular when security issues directly concern the interests of one of the countries involved in ASEM. Territorial disputes in Asia can be cited in this context, for example. Furthermore, some Asian ASEM member countries continue to cite the above-mentioned principle of non-interference if and when an issue or an area is deemed too sensitive in the national context. This is, for example, sometimes the case when human rights, freedom of speech, and expression, as well as issues related to governance and democracy make it onto the agenda in countries in which the human rights and freedom of speech and expression record is deemed problematic. To be sure, it must not go unmentioned that the recent change of government in Poland (October 2015) and the re-election of the incumbent government in Hungary in 2014 have undoubtedly done significant damage to EU and European ability to criticize others on problematic records of human rights, freedom of speech, and accountable and transparent governance.

The principle of non-interference has also stymied cooperation between the EU and Asia in the domain of human security associated with protection of the individual. While Western nations typically argue for more robust action under the freedom from fear component of human security when it comes to protecting populations from the threats of genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity, most Asian countries are wary of military action violating the sovereignty of a state and leading to regime change: one of the specific bones of contention in this realm. The 2003 war in Iraq and subsequent forced regime change led by Western nations has done more harm than good for prospects of security cooperation between Europe and Asia. Syria is a case in point where many Asian nations including India and China strictly opposed military action on Damascus or against the Assad regime.

Other than territorial disputes, maritime security provides a suitable area for European and Asian states to collaborate on. The Indian Ocean and the Gulf of Aden are maritime zones of immense significance for Europe and Asia given that interregional trade passes through

these waters, which are heavily affected by piracy. The EU is leading the world's largest anti-piracy operation NAVFOR-Atalanta off the coast of Somalia in the Gulf of Aden and has welcomed cooperation from its Asian partners. Some Asian actors have either joined or cooperated on the effort, including Japan, China, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia, and India. But some Asian countries like Japan, India, and China mainly operate separately and are reluctant to be an official part of Operation Atalanta with collaboration remaining limited to information sharing and coordination of patrol flight. One of the main disagreements is that while the EU believes that action should be taken on Somalian territory itself, they remain wary of violating Somalia's sovereignty.

To be sure, non-interference is only one (and not always and necessarily the main) obstacle to European-Asian security cooperation in the ASEM context, but it is nonetheless necessary to single it out as one stumbling block toward more concrete and result-oriented security cooperation.

4 Recommendations with Little Follow-up

Over the years, Track-II ASEM meetings, workshops, seminars, and publications have produced numerous policy recommendations, which have been presented to policymakers (Elies et al. 2011). Of these recommendations, only very few have made it on to the ASEM working agenda or have resulted in actual ASEM policies. EU policymakers and EU institutions in particular have over the years commissioned numerous studies and requested scholars and analysts to suggest policy recommendations. While the Track-II meetings between European and Asian scholars are an important part of the ASEM process of bringing civil society of both regions together, they tend to have very little impact on ASEM as a platform. There is clearly a lack of political will and next to no sense of urgency to make use of policy recommendations especially as ASEM enters its third decade. Among others, recommendations suggested the establishment of joint European-Asian strategies and policies tackling drugs and human trafficking, adoption of joint climate security policies, coordination of migration policies and joint disaster management policies. Furthermore, scholars such as the above-cited Timo Kivimäki have pointed out the possibility of ASEM promoting the formulation and adoption of joint European-Asian UN peacekeeping strategies and policies. This, as Elies et al. (2011) have suggested, could also include the

promotion of inter-operability of national peacekeeping forces, joint training and the establishment of a joint Europe-Asia peacekeeping center. These are, without a doubt, valuable ideas and recommendations, which could—if placed onto ASEM's working agenda—add value to ASEM as a forum. However, the recommendation to institutionalize joint European-Asian peacekeeping policies and initiatives has not—at least not yet—made it into the official ASEM agenda.

Several times in the past it has also been suggested to institutionalize security cooperation through the establishment of an ASEM secretariat. While this suggestion will probably continue to surface every once in a while, it is very unlikely to become a reality in the short to medium term as ASEM members do not seem to deem the establishment of a secretariat a necessity. Furthermore, it remains unclear how and to what extent a secretariat would be further able to facilitate more result-oriented and tangible security cooperation within ASEM. It must be recalled that the absence of tangible security cooperation within ASEM is not due to a lack of coordination but rather due to a lack of political will and the absence of the urgency among ASEM member states to turn ASEM into a forum that requires binding commitments in the areas of traditional and non-traditional security.

What is more, ASEM does not have a budget for any joint initiatives and hence depends on its member states' ad hoc funding for specific initiatives. Providing funds in the absence of a budget requires the consensus of all ASEM member states, which is potentially again a recipe for slow action. In the past it was several times suggested to establish ASEM peacekeeping training center and facilities, in view of the fact that ASEM countries contribute the majority of UN peacekeeping troops (Arendal 2001, pp. 20–32). However, this suggestion never made it onto the official ASEM agenda, not least because the benefits and added value of such facilities are not necessarily obvious. UN peacekeeping is coordinated by UN institutions and ASEM peacekeeping training facilities—even if funded with sufficient resources—would probably merely duplicate what is already coordinated at the UN level. Conflict prevention, conflict mediation, conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction and reconciliation too often made it onto the ASEM agenda without much follow-up by concrete and tangible outputs. In fact, ASEM does not have and has not adopted any conflict prevention or conflict management policies for any relevant security conflict in Asia or Europe and this is very unlikely to change any time soon. That said, however, the forum has at

the summit in Milan in 2014 been able to facilitate a trilateral EU-Russia-Ukraine meeting relating to a dispute on Russian gas supplies to Europe via the Ukraine. ASEM's involvement in Asia's current security conflicts, however, will—unless (all) ASEM member states agreed to "multilateralize" the conflict and assign an official mediating role to ASEM—continue to remain very limited. For now, ASEM for instance has not played any mediating role between Asian countries involved in Asia's territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas. To be sure, expecting a role of ASEM in managing, let alone solving Asia's territorial disputes which involve China was always going to be unrealistic, as China continues to insist on what Beijing refers to as the "principle of non-interference," and therefore refuses a priori any outside involvement in its territorial disputes with Japan (in the East China Sea) and a number of Southeast Asian nations in the South China Sea (Godement 2013; Duchâtel et al. 2014). In fact, China's very assertive policies related to territorial claims in the East and South China Seas in 2015 in particular have demonstrated that Beijing is not prepared to allow multilateral bodies—especially the UN or ASEM to deal with the (many) territorial disputes it is involved in.[5] The main reason is that while other international mechanisms for dispute settlement exist, such as the International Tribunal for the laws of the Sea (ITLOS), a solution is not guaranteed and governments are often presented with a fait accompli (Khandekar 2012).

The ASEM's Foreign Ministers' Meeting in New Delhi in November 2013 sought to make a result-oriented contribution to rendering ASEM and cooperation between ASEM member states more concrete and result-oriented. The Indian chair encouraged ASEM members to achieve more result-oriented and tangible outcomes and urged ASEM to incorporate more stakeholders and interested parties from business, civil society, media, and academia. To make the ASEM process more transparent and accountable, the Indian chair at the time furthermore suggested to produce reports on the state of implementation of the policy initiatives proposed in ASEM summits, and in other words, reports, which document whether policies suggested during ASEM meetings have been implemented. The meeting's official press statement referred to this approach and mode of concrete collaboration with like-minded countries as "tangible cooperation" (ASEM Infoboard 2013). While this is not the same as developing and adopting joint ASEM policies, it is nonetheless positive if like-minded individual ASEM members take the opportunity of regular ASEM meetings to formulate and later adopt joint policies,

including in the areas of traditional or non-traditional security. However, that idea and approach is not entirely new and was in past referred to as issue-based leadership, first at the ASEM Summit in Helsinki in 2006 and then also at the ASEM Summit in Brussels in 2010 (de Crombrugghe 2011, pp. 171–244). However, the idea and concept of tangible cooperation as suggested by ASEM's Foreign Ministers in New Delhi was not followed up, that is, there is no evidence of groups of like-minded countries jointly working on a defined set of issues and areas.

ASEM Foreign Ministers in India also recommended to—through what in the statement is referred to as "implementation reports"—keep track of the results of the various Track I and Track II ASEM meeting, allowing interested parties to monitor the various activities. In other words, ministers recommended keeping an inventory, which would render ASEM activities more transparent and accountable to interested parties. Because tracking the record of ASEM as a platform for individual ASEM member states to discuss and adopt their individual bilateral or multilateral policies goes beyond the scope of this chapter, it can hence not be verified whether ASEM meetings have been the birthplace of ASEM member states adopting joint security policies. Then again, it cannot be excluded that ASEM-facilitated security cooperation is taking place bilaterally among ASEM member states. While the above-mentioned inventory was without a doubt a constructive idea, no such list exists today.[6] In fact, such a list was not mentioned again in ensuing ASEM meetings, including the ASEM Summits in Milan in 2014 and in Ulaanbaatar in 2016.

5 The Timid Role Model

The EU can be a role model for Asia as regards preventive diplomacy, confidence building, and establishing norms and rules to ensure regional peace and stability. There is no doubt that Europe has over the decades acquired enormous expertise in the area of conflict management, conflict prevention, and the creation and sustenance of peace between former enemies and geopolitical rivals. Such experience arguably allows the EU to share its experiences of peace and stability and non-traditional security cooperation within the ASEM process. However, that has not happened yet and Europe and European policymakers are often explaining their inaction and timidity to share experiences by arguing that they do not want to "lecture" Asian counterparts. Against the background of former

European colonialism in Asia, this is understandable and also appreciated by Asian policymakers,[7] but it can nonetheless be argued that the EU is not sufficiently seizing the opportunity to take the lead in something Europe is or could be very good at. To be sure, Europe's current track record is far from perfect as the current migration crisis in Europe, as well as the emergence of partially authoritarian governments in Hungary and more recently Poland, demonstrates. However, in spite of the current difficulties and above-mentioned current setbacks as regards the formulation and adoption of joint internal and external policies, the EU as a supranational institution remains equipped with enormous experience and resources relating to conflict prevention and crisis management. This could certainly be of use for Asian countries if these would choose to use EU experience and expertise in these areas.

6 None of ASEM's Business

At times ASEM also gets mentioned as a promoter of a global security order (Asia-Europe Vision Group 1999). This, however, can arguably sound a bit too optimistic and grandiose, in view of ASEM's very limited above-mentioned absence of any measurable impact of the forum on global or even regional security. While the EU has the ambitions to be a promoter and defender of a multilateral security order and a proponent of what Brussels refers to as "effective multilateralism" (Gratius 2011; Wissenbach 2007), this approach toward regional and international security, however, has only limited relevance in the ASEM framework, not least as ASEM member states are simply too numerous and diverse to agree on the mode and level of multilateral policies. What is more, as the recent past has shown, the EU and its member states have had enormous difficulties living up to the commitment of adopting and implementing policies multilaterally and assigning the formulation and adoption of individual foreign and security policies to the EU.[8] In the recent past ASEM meetings discussed Iran's nuclear program, developments in the Middle East and North Africa, the regional security environment in Asia, the Korean Peninsula, including the DPRK's nuclear and missile programs as well as the human rights situation, including the so-called "abduction issue,"[9] and security developments in Europe, including Ukraine (ASEM Infoboard 2015). These issues of international security, however, are issues and conflicts ASEM is not equipped to make tangible contributions to. In other words: issues and areas of security where

ASEM as a forum has no stake and role whatsoever make it nonetheless onto ASEM's official agenda, negatively affecting ASEM's credibility as a forum able to deal with issues it is equipped to deal with. To be sure, a number of individual ASEM member states do have a role and interest in the above-mentioned areas of international security, but such individual interests and involvement do not necessarily justify placing them on ASEM's agenda. In fact, it is counterproductive as they are issues that appear on the agenda without being dealt with. From an analyst's point of view arguing that ASEM Foreign Ministers endorsed agreements adopted by others does arguably not add to the forum's credibility. In fact, it leaves the impression that ASEM—due to the fact that it does not adopt agreements of practical relevance—is de facto obliged to refer in its official statements to (successful) agreements others have adopted. Instead, ASEM should in its statements limit itself to referring to its very own initiatives in order to reduce vulnerability to criticism. However, ASEM will most probably continue to place the above-mentioned "high-politics" issues on the agenda and therefore give the impression that it is dealing (on paper and through its official documents) with issues and areas it is not dealing with in reality.

7 Not a Priority

After 20 years of existence, ASEM would by now have had a role in Asian security if the forum's member states had displayed the political will to assign such a role to ASEM. That could lead us to conclude that ASEM is not important enough for its member states to invest resources into seeking to equip the forum with the instruments and political capital to formulate joint policies, let alone joint security policies. ASEM Summits are without much doubt important occasions for Asian and European leaders to meet on an informal basis, but it is accurate to conclude that ASEM Summits have a rather low priority, in particular among European policymakers and do typically not receive much media coverage at all in Europe. Indeed, ASEM Summits are usually a passing mention in European capitals and do not generate much attention outside of Brussels. Given the international situation with its multiple crisis, it is fair to conclude that policymakers in Asia and Europe will continue to accord limited attention to ASEM as a forum that could address their respective security concerns. Resources are scarce and given ASEM's informal character and the absence of instruments, member states will

continue to spend resources relevant for security policies elsewhere and with other organizations. In times of geopolitical, social and economic problems in both Europe and Asia, political leaders will continue to find it easier or indeed necessary to prioritize security and stability in their respective regions.

The current migration crisis in Europe and territorial disputes in Asia will most probably continue to remain on top of Europe and Asia's respective policy agendas in the months and indeed years ahead, meaning that the resources destined for security issues and conflicts outside of Europe and Asia respectively will remain scarce. Furthermore, it must be pointed out that Asia and Europe do not share all security concerns even if the official rhetoric of ASEM Summits suggests otherwise. While geopolitical rivalries and fissures are largely absent in Europe, geopolitical tensions and conflicts are part of Asia's security environment today. Indeed, Asia has over recent years experienced intensification of geopolitical tensions (above all between Japan and China) in general, and of territorial disputes in the East China Sea and South China Sea in particular. While reconciliation between former enemies in Europe has been completed a long time ago, again the same cannot be said for Asian reconciliation. In fact, disagreement and controversies related to the interpretation of World War II history in general and Japanese World War II militarism and imperialism in particular continue to stand in the way of anything resembling sustainable Sino-Japanese reconciliation. ASEM for its part cannot do anything about it other than providing a platform for countries (e.g. Japan and China or India and Pakistan) to discuss bilaterally on the sidelines of ASEM meetings. Remainders of the Cold War such as the division of the Korean Peninsula too are part of Asia's security environment as well as unfinished reconciliation, above all the one between the region's most powerful countries China and Japan (Werly 2015, p. 96). In fact, geopolitical rivalries in Asia have increased and Asia's territorial disputes in the East and South China Seas will continue to remain on top of Asia's policy agenda in the years ahead.

While it is true that ASEM does not produce joint EU-Asian security policies, it would be wrong to conclude that the forum's impact on the region's security and security environment is completely non-existent. It remains an important platform for policymakers to meet and talk to each other without feeling obliged to produce concrete results. This is without a doubt useful as these encounters create an atmosphere in which policymakers can talk to each other candidly without having to fear that

outspoken or controversial views or disagreements among ASEM members will feature in joint statements or declarations which have been drafted and published with the consent of all ASEM member states.

8 Conclusions

In fairness, it is very difficult to adopt security policies simultaneously by 53 members. Unless ASEM moves beyond consensus-style decision-making toward mechanisms and instruments allowing the forum to adopt policies in a swifter manner, ASEM will continue to limit itself to adopting broad declarations, which are acceptable in tone and contents to all ASEM member states. ASEM's consensus-based decision-making process is typically associated with what is referred to as the "lowest common denominator" decision-making (Yeo 2015, p. 29). This, however, can be a recipe for slow action or indeed inaction, as experience has shown. As elaborated above, the reasons why security cooperation in ASEM is not productive are numerous. The above analysis has sought to explain why ASEM has a very limited real role in and impact on European and Asian hard security while it has limited potential in addressing Europe-Asian non-traditional security issues. Consequently, those who expect ASEM to have a role in trying to defuse territorial disputes in Europe or Asia—or mediate between sparring partners will continue to be disappointed. Those on the other hand who hope that ASEM will make a (modest) contribution to the resolution of non-traditional security issues as a platform provider for informal discussions have reason to be optimistic. In fairness, ASEM never claimed to be able to make tangible contributions to hard security beyond the provision of a platform for ASEM members to discuss hard security issues informally. However, given its limited resources and the absence of instruments (and political will) to adopt joint security policies that go beyond general-sounding statements on security in joint statements after ASEM Summits, ASEM should be more upfront about its inability to deal with security resulting in tangible joint policies. ASEM's choice to include security issues in its agenda may not have been in the forum's best interests given the re-allocation of limited resources from areas in which ASEM produces actual results: interregional cultural dialogue, people-to-people exchanges and other soft issues and areas that ASEM is equipped to deal with very well.

In view of ASEM's above-described shortcomings as regards the forum's ability to deal with and work on the security issues on its agenda,

ASEM's political leaders are advised to limit their on-paper ambitions on what ASEM can actually do in regional and global security. The truth is that it can do very little that goes beyond offering a platform for political leaders to discuss security issues on an informal basis without being able to adopt actual ASEM security policies of relevance. That said, ASEM could and indeed should increase its involvement in non-traditional security issues although it is strongly advised—in view of the limited resources, consensus-style decision and policymaking processes—to choose a limited number of issues and areas related to security the forum wants to deal with. However, past ASEM summit agendas suggest that ASEM's leaders will most probably not choose that direction in the future and will instead continue to overload the ASEM agenda with security issues and areas the forum does not have the resources and political will to deal with efficiently.

Notes

1. The ARF brings together 27 countries: the 10 ASEAN member countries (Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam), the 10 ASEAN Dialogue Partners (Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, ROK, New Zealand, Russia and United States of America) and 7 other countries, namely Bangladesh, the DPRK, Mongolia, Pakistan, Papua New Guinea, Timor Leste and Sri Lanka.
2. The ADMM comprises Defense Ministers from the ASEAN countries, and in the format of ADMM-Plus includes a dialogue with eight partners, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the U.S.
3. That assessment, however, is since the outbreak of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2014 only partially true.
4. Arguably some are more and some are less obliged to be accountable, depending on the level of democratic governance structures in the country in question.
5. Large parts of the territorial waters in the South China Sea are contested and China is by far the biggest and the most assertive claimant country. In the South China Sea Beijing's territorial disputes include the Paracel Islands (also claimed by Taiwan and Vietnam), the Spratly Islands (claimed by Taiwan, Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia and Brunei) and the Scarborough Shoal (claimed also both by Taiwan and the Philippines). Through its so-called 'Nine-Dash Line' (a line marking the borders of Chinese territorial waters as viewed from China) Beijing claims sovereignty

over more than 90% of the South China Sea. The 'Nine-Dash Line' stretches several hundreds of miles south and east from China's most southerly province of Hainan.

6. At least to this author's knowledge.
7. Indeed, the author's interviews and conversations with policymakers in Asia in general and Southeast Asia in particular reveal that this is still a very sensitive issue in Asia, in particular in those Asian countries which were occupied and colonized by European countries.
8. For example in Iraq in 2003 when some EU members joined the US-led so-called "coalition of the willing" while others did not and were strongly opposed to the war; another example is the British-French bilateral military mission attacking Libya in March 2011.
9. The abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea's secret service in the 1970s and 1980s; in 2002 Pyongyang officially admitted that up to 35 Japanese citizens were indeed kidnapped by "rogue" secret service agents and brought to Japan to "work" in captivity as Japanese language instructors for the secret service.

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CHAPTER 5

The Value-Added ASEM: The Socio-Cultural Dialogue

Huong Le Thu

1 Introduction

This chapter addresses the value of cultural cooperation in the inter-regional Asia-Europe Meeting process. It contributes to the literature by giving an in-depth analysis of the third pillar of ASEM, which existing scholarship has failed to address in-depth. This chapter goes through the breadth of cultural cooperation activities, assessing the de facto definition of what is understood as "cultural cooperation." By doing so it analyses the mandates and the role of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), which functions as the executor of the ASEM agenda but also as the active agent leading ASEM cultural cooperation.

This chapter assesses ASEF in terms of its independent capacity in leading and initiating a cultural agenda. It argues that ASEF, the only permanently established institution of ASEM, has proved itself as the most sustainable and effective pillar of ASEM. This argument reveals the value of culture in the political process. In addition it shows that "cultural brokerage," at this level seen as interaction between elites,[1] and

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elite socialization provide for a certain cultural continuity across national and, in this case, also, continental boundaries.

The difficulty with analyzing socio-cultural cooperation lies in the breadth of its agenda, and the intangibility of the outcomes. Nevertheless, this research scrutinizes different angles of its contribution by looking at the successes and challenges of such programs. This chapter argues that despite the intangibility of its nature, for an observer, scholar, and a representative of civil society, it is the third pillar that paradoxically is the most tangible because of its accessibility.

Unlike the elite representation in the two other pillars, cultural cooperation is the only sphere within ASEM that is open to participation for citizens of member countries. As this chapter shall prove, ASEF, the facilitator of those activities, is, hence, the very manifestation of "ASEM's added value."

2 Cultural Cooperation Within the Mandate of ASEM: A Concise Overview of the Cultural Policy Agenda

At the moment of establishment, the "third pillar" was the least concrete, being named "cooperation in other areas." Gradually it transformed into "socio-cultural cooperation." This shows a certain asymmetric progress among the agenda of the pillars. The changes became manifest on the occasion of the ASEM7 summit in 2008, which noted that the socio-cultural dimension had played a less prominent role compared with political dialogue and economic cooperation (Kim 2010, p. 4).

A review of all ASEM Summits statements shows that the development of the cultural agenda had a slow start. The first summit in 1996 barely mentioned "cooperation in other areas" as necessary for bringing the people of either region together and learn about each other. At ASEM2 in 1998 the leaders agreed that ASEM initiatives should encourage the growing interests of all sectors of society in Asia-Europe relations and thus promote a human dimension for the forum (ASEM 1998). The third ASEM summit in 2000 addressed socio-economic issues and globalization. Leaders stressed the importance of human resource development in alleviating economic and social disparities, and reconfirmed their intention to enhance the welfare of the socially weak by promoting social safety nets (ASEM 2000). ASEM3 also endorsed the Korea-French

Trans-Eurasian Network (TEIN), which started operating in 2001. This was an important initiative, as it provided a direct link between Asian and European research and education networks.

ASEM4 in 2002 reflected the general tension in the global security environment after the 9/11 terrorist attacks. Since then the third pillar has been regarded as a way to address the adverse consequences of globalization and as a way to fight the root causes of terrorism and international crime. As a seminal evaluation report on ASEM (University of Helsinki Network for European Studies 2006, p. 114) phrased it, "cultural and social issues have finally claimed their rightful place in the ASEM discussion forum." Awareness arose that events that would have been dealt with in the security and political forum also need to be tackled in the cultural context. It could be said that the cultural agenda has been granted its position as a result of the political and security-related implications of a "clash of civilizations." Furthermore, discussions taken place in the year 2001, which was also proclaimed by the UN as the "United Nations Year of Dialogue among Civilizations," contributed to the higher priority given to the issue of inter-civilizational dialogue in ASEM during 2002.

In addition, ASEM4 also endorsed the Conference on Cultures and Civilization (COCC), which was followed by the first conference in Beijing in December 2003 on the initiative of China, Denmark, France, Indonesia, Malaysia, and Singapore. Issues such as enhanced efforts in educational and cultural exchanges to prevent prejudice and stereotypes were identified. The importance of UNESCO instruments for international cooperation, dialogue on cultural diversity and involvement of youth were equally acknowledged. At the EU level the updated Asia strategy paper (European Commission 2001) acknowledged the lack of progress in the field intercultural dialogue. The document observed that mutual awareness has not evolved greatly, with Asia and Europe still stereotyping the other as introspective and old-fashioned, or distant and exotic, respectively. ASEM aims to counter the Huntington scenario and promote "unity in diversity," drawing on the dialogue and confidence-building character, specifically addressing the role of education, access to information, and the involvement of civil society (Gaens 2008, pp. 88–89).

ASEM5, held in 2004 in Hanoi, adopted the "ASEM Declaration on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilizations," which, except for education and culture, added an agenda on creativity and exchange of ideas,

as well as promotion of sustainable and responsible cultural tourism, protection and promotion of cultural resources, and strengthening the capacity of ASEF. The flagship program "Talks on the Hills" was initiated that year. The Bali Inter-Faith Dialogue Meeting was held on 21–22 July 2005, jointly funded by Great Britain and Indonesia. The Bali Declaration on Building Interfaith Harmony with International Community adopted during the meeting translated commonly shared values of peace, compassion and tolerance into practical actions in the fields of education, culture, media, and religion and society (Gaens 2008, p. 90).

ASEM6 in 2006 in Helsinki arguably received the highest degree of attention, due to its coinciding with the tenth anniversary of the summit, held under the theme of "10 Years of ASEM: Global Challenges—Joint Responses. Apart from the leaders' summit, the tenth Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) and sixth Asia-Europe People's Forum were held as well. The Nargis Cyclone in Myanmar dominated ASEM7 in 2008. Hence, the theme of discussion focused heavily on sustainable development and natural disaster mitigation. Cultural cooperation was recognized under the aegis of the 1st Alliance of Civilizations (AoC) Forum held in Madrid in January 2008 and the consolidation of this UN Initiative. The emphasis was put on the "momentum" of interfaith dialogue and urged ASEM member states to facilitate intercultural dialogue on regional and interregional levels. ASEF was recognized for its efforts in collaborating with UNESCO in line with the UNESCO Convention on Promotion and Protection of Diversity of Cultural Expressions. ASEF was also praised for the launch of Culture360—the first Asia-Europe cultural web-portal to enhance art and cultural exchange among ASEM member countries.

ASEM8, held in Brussels in 2010, had a stronger social and environmental focus. Among issues raised were the social cohesion, human rights and human security, and various aspects of security. The cultural agenda was sidelined, while noting the Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations. Contribution of ASEF to the visibility of ASEM and its efforts in networking of activities for promoting mutual understanding between Asia and Europe was recognized. The ASEM9 summit in 2012 in Vientiane was dominated by discussions on the global economic crisis. Within the cultural cooperation agenda, the emphasis was placed on the Interfaith Dialogue and heritage promotion, and the exchange of expertise in both regions. ASEM10 (Milan 2014) underscored the importance

of safeguarding the tangible and intangible heritage of all cultures, and pointed out the role to be played by the ASM Culture Ministers' Meeting. Tourism as well was emphasized as an engine for growth, job creation, and people-to-people contacts. Held under the banner of "Partnership for the Future through Connectivity," the ASEM11 summit held in Mongolia aimed to further promote the people-to-people dimension of connectivity, in particular through cultural, academic, tourism and youth exchanges. The ASEM-DUO fellowship program can be seen as one successful initiative promoting education cooperation. The ASEM11 Chair's Statement also included an impressive list of ASEF's contributions to the ASEM process in 2015, which included activities, workshops, public fora, a youth summit, exhibitions and so on in the sidelines of the Foreign Ministers' Meeting, and feeding to ministerial meetings in the spheres of culture, education, labor and employment, finance, and environment (ASEM 2016).

3 The Asia-Europe Foundation

3.1 Origin and Organization

The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) was established in 1997, a year after ASEM's inception. It was an initiative of Singaporean and French leaders, tasked with engaging civil societies across ASEM members into the interregional process. Its mandate was to manage activities falling under the third pillar of ASEM cooperation, namely cultural, intellectual, and people-to-people exchanges. To date, ASEF is the only institution of ASEM. The ASEF has been evaluated as the most visible and concrete manifestation of ASEM, and a reflection of the commitment of ASEM countries to promote Asia-Europe relations (Yeo 2003, p. 54). The Foundation was funded by voluntary contributions from its partner governments who share the financing of projects with its civil society partners. The organization is governed by a Board of Governors, appointed by their respective ASEM member countries, nominated for a period of 3 years. The Board meets thrice in 2 years to set out policy direction for ASEF. The organization frames its works under three thematic groups: Cultural Exchange, Intellectual Exchange, and People-to-People Exchange; and three administrative departments: the Executive Office, Public Affairs, and Finance and Administration.

3.2 Development

The development of ASEF interestingly reflects the evolution of ASEM itself. This section examines the reality of organization in view of ASEM's official mandate. The linkages and determinants between ASEM and ASEF have undergone different phases of evolution since its inception. A closer inspection of ASEF archives and interviews with long-time ASEF staff reveal some apparent traits that allow for a categorization of the following four phases.

3.2.1 Phase One: "Event-Organizer"

In the initial years, ASEF was event-oriented, organizing "one-off" type of events rather than sustainable, long-term projects. The programs launched during this phase were more for the sake of creating networking opportunities for the participants rather than generating significant outcomes. It was an important contribution nonetheless, given the fact that ASEF introduced a process of regular meetings and collaboration among such a diverse group.

3.2.2 Phase Two: "Experimental Entrepreneur"

After the first few years, ASEF's programs were streamlined into four thematic areas, namely Education, Science and Technology; Governance and Human Rights; Culture and Civilization; and International Relations. During this period, ASEF managed to invent a safe space for candid and honest dialogue on sensitive topics where participants—often officials, intellectuals, and policy-makers—had "off-record" opportunities to express their views. This phase was successful in spawning confidence among interlocutors in discussing sensitive issues.

3.2.3 Phase Three: "Trademark"

Following its series of initial experiments, ASEF started aiming at continuity and deepened the impact of its work by limiting the scope of topics.[2] This process has become the trademark of ASEF's quality (Le Thu 2014). These activities are:

- Human Rights Seminars—Established in 1998, the Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights—is organized and managed by the ASEF Intellectual Exchange Department. These seminars include different actors: government officials, academics, and civil

societies from ASEM member countries. The inclusion of the civil society has become a rule of the meetings in order to have equal representation from governments and NGOs to the table, while the European Commission and ASEAN Secretariat are also involved.

- Asia-Europe Environment Forum—Active since 2003—ASEF and the Environmental Forum were recognized by the ASEM Environment Ministers in 2007. ASEF has initiated several programs, which provide a platform for discussion on the global challenges of sustainable development, and other environment-related issues under its Sustainable Development and Environment theme. The Forum works in partnership with national environment and development agencies, as well as with UNEP.
- ASEF University (AU)—is a 2-week program that engages the youth to promote cross-cultural exchanges. It is an annual event that rotates between Asian and European member countries. To date, ASEF has organized 20 AU and has met with essential interest and support, which can be seen in the active network of AU's alumni network—ASEFUAN.
- Culture 360—an online platform informing the people of Asia and Europe about each other through arts and culture. It is designed to create networking opportunities for cultural professionals who are looking to share ideas by providing relevant information through weekly updates on news, events, opportunities, and resources. It also features a cultural magazine with in-depth articles, interviews and profiles, and social media tools to enable online networking between individuals, as well as organizations across the ASEM regions.
- Perception Studies—this series of studies has explored perceptions, images and also stereotypes of Asians toward Europeans and Europeans toward Asians through media analysis, public opinion surveys, and elite interviews. This project is pioneering in terms of its geographical coverage of Asian and European countries and makes a valuable contribution to mutual understanding.[3]

3.2.4 Phase Four: Long-Lasting Value-Added Activities

In recent years, there has been a tendency to reduce the number of programs in favor of more sustainable programs with succinct outcomes. There is more of a long-term planning approach with a 3- to 4-year timeframe, and focusing on long-standing functional partnerships. In

the past, ASEF turned to member countries for assistance in hosting events, whereas now it has started to look for partners to co-organize these events with. There is a tendency to tap into larger international events and existing networks, rather than create something from scratch. An example of such direction is the ASEF program "Asia-Europe Environmental Forum." By participating in the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012, ASEF transcended the Asia-Europe context and engaged itself in the ongoing discussion at the global stage.[4]

At this stage, the organization does not aim to host multiple, diverse events, but rather seeks to tap into existing fora and contribute to inter-regional Asia-Europe resources. Unlike in the past, when it used to tackle "new" issues, ASEF now is focused on exchanging information and practices among member countries over existing debates. The goal of the events and activities it organizes is to produce publications that document best practices of certain issue areas in each of the member countries, serving recommendation purposes. The remaining challenge, however, is to identify common areas of cooperation that Asian and European members can equally commit to.[5]

4 The Nebulous Relationship Between ASEM and ASEF

ASEF is seen, by many of those involved in the process, as an actor in its own right. Although created by ASEM governments and supported by ASEM funding, it has a life of its own and is capable of creating outcomes and contributions, particularly in terms of intellectual input. Cautious of cultural, social, economic and political diversities among ASEM's members, ASEF is a good exemplar of multicultural cooperation that carefully balances the different backgrounds with equal representation.

The habit of mutual learning by building a safe space for frank communication has been created. ASEF has managed to create an atmosphere of honest and candid discussion without any "blame game"[6]; and hence, it has contributed to mutual understanding on sensitive issues that would not be expressed otherwise. A fairly recent contribution by ASEF toward enhancing Asia-Europe relations is through its publication "ASEM Outlook Report 2012" in collaboration with the United Nations University Institute for Comparative Regional

Integration Studies (UNU-CRIS). The report is a two-volume study mapping out the megatrends in current issues affecting both Asia and Europe and drawing on ASEF's scenario building for policy recommendation. Reflecting ASEM's new focus on connectivity, a new edition of the two-volume report entitled "ASEF Outlook Report 2016/2017—Connectivity" appeared in 2016 in line with the ASEM11 summit.[7]

In that light, the Asia-Europe Foundation has been successfully playing the following roles:

1. Expert in Asia-Europe relations;
2. Contributor to Asia and Europe mutual understanding, by such projects as perception studies;
3. Scenario builder for certain issues commonly affecting Asia and Europe: economic integration, public health, environment, and conflict management;
4. Policy advisor;
5. Expert in comparative regionalism in Asia and Europe;
6. Publisher and information disseminator;
7. Dialogue facilitator on different levels.

4.1 ASEF's Contributions to the ASEM Process

4.1.1 Pluralization of Actors

One of the most relevant among ASEF's many contributions and achievements is the inclusion of a variety of actors in the process. By involving civil society into the dialogue with governmental representations, ASEF has added to the pluralization of Asia-Europe interregionalism. A number of scholars have acknowledged ASEF's contribution to the democratization and pluralization of Asia-Europe interregionalism (Keva 2008).

4.1.2 The Value of Cultural Cooperation

The diversity of the participants ASEF invites to its events/meetings and the policy-recommendation function can be seen as examples of the impact of its work on cultural cooperation. ASEF's work connecting civil societies to the leaders' levels' was a slow and gradual process. At the beginning of both the ASEM and ASEF processes, there was a vague idea of how civil societies could be included in the interregional

dialogue. Such inclusion, however, was not extensively elaborated upon, given the reservations of certain member countries. Participation of people from ASEM member countries was to be handled by and within ASEF. Following the intensification of ASEF activities, and as argued earlier in this chapter, the increase in the role of ASEF and socialization of the definition and role of civil society concepts by the member countries, the involvement and input of civil societies has grown in importance.

As ASEF has grown and restructured its organization, so have its activities become more oriented toward policy recommendation. The increasing presence and involvement of Asian and European civil societies in ASEF activities and thus the ASEM process has slowly entrenched civil society into the cultural cooperation pillar. As an example thereof, the following evaluation of one of ASEF flagship programs illustrates inclusiveness and diversity of profiles of actors involved and their contribution to the process.

As a result of sustainable dialogues and exchanges, in particular the ASEF flagship Intellectual Exchange programs "Dialogue of Civilizations" and "Talk on the Hills" which engage academics, policy-makers, and scholars in order to address sensitive issues regarded as "obstacles" in Asia-Europe relations, a global network of epistemic communities has emerged. By definition an epistemic community comprises renowned experts and scholars who engage in a sustainable bi-regional process.

The Asia-Europe dialogue has thereby reached a degree of continuity and momentum that holds the capacity to bridge knowledge gaps between them in order to use the exchange of views and ideas productively to gradually influence policy-making (Haas 1992). Issues related to cultural cooperation therefore have their intangible benefits. However, in the above-made attempt to measure the effectiveness of the socio-cultural pillar, it has been proved that certain benefits are clearly tangible too. ASEF itself, with its concrete projects, contributions, and people's participation, is an example of the palpability of ASEM's existence.

4.1.3 Interregionalism Through Intellectual and Educational Exchanges

One of the biggest inputs of the interregional process is creating and facilitating a channel for intellectual communications. ASEF's facilitation in education exchange is another key contribution. As argued by Gaens (2008, p. 92), "ASEF-initiated programs on education and academic cooperation, the ASEM-DUO umbrella program, the TEIN project, and

most recently the ASEM Database on Education Exchange Programs (DEEP), a comprehensive portal on universities, student exchange and scholarships in Asia and Europe launched by ASEF in April 2007, are all visible signs of the increasingly important position education takes within ASEM." Discourses surrounding socio-cultural and educational EU-Asia exchanges connect with wider debates on the "role of civilizations," the "contributions" of East and West, respectively to global invention and knowledge, and the "triangular" context of Asia-Europe relations, in which EU-Asia dialogue forms the neglected link.

The most appropriate conceptual framework for analyzing Asia-Europe intellectual exchanges is, arguably, represented by the discourse about "culture" and "context" in International Relations (Reiterer 2004). Some observers have highlighted culture as the "logical link" between various EU foreign policy strategies on Asia and in general. Socio-cultural co-operation can be seen as a safeguard against the "inevitable" temptations of societies to "absolutist" themselves (Lawson 2006, p. 13). Culture in the political and international context is often seen as a "vehicle of tolerance," an "agenda for co-operation" and an "instrument of mediation" (Stokhof et al. 1999, p. 38; Yeo and Latif 2000).

This is accompanied by investigations of trans-regional dialogues the role of education as a "toolkit" toward building regional identity and of concerns about Asian Universities and "Western" information. ASEM has created the sustainable program of Asia-Europe Education Hub (AEH) that has engaged a significant number of scholars, researchers, students, research centers, and universities across Asia and Europe. Educational projects have been one of the strongest facets of Asia-Europe interregional cooperation, not only within the third pillar, but also in the overall ASEM process. One important reason for this is the EU's strong commitments to education programs, and its leading role in fostering education in Asia-Europe relations. One can see the prevalence of attention to the education programs in EC papers:

- *The Role of Universities in the Europe of Knowledge* (COM (2003) 58)
- *Education, Training and Research: Trans-National Mobility* (COM (96) 462)
- *Inter-Cultural Dialogue and Understanding* (COM (2002) 401)
- *Teaching and Learning—Towards the Learning Society* (COM (95) 590)

The EU's commitment to educational exchanges is not solely motivated by intellectual benefits. It serves well to promote EU studies, deepening understanding of EU structures and acting as public diplomacy for the EU. Thus, "visibility" of the EU's activities is a recurring strand. This is sometimes disguised as "developing human resources," for instance under the *Erasmus-Mundus China Window* and in similar other initiatives. Other EU blueprints such as *A New Partnership with South East Asia* (COM (2003) 99) add new, crosscutting objectives such as poverty-reduction, gender-equality, primary education, citizenship training, and the human right to education.

Interestingly, cooperation on education is not free from the cultural context. Most EU-Asia initiatives in this field can be said to have in common two key aspects: a high degree of fragmentation accompanying a measure of cultural diffusion; and, a lack of maturity and significant critical engagement with the discipline itself and its impact on Asian partners (European College for Cultural Co-operation 1996, p. 108).

The most significant achievements of the socio-cultural and learning-related dimensions of EU-Asia relations include the following:

- EU centers in Asia
- ASEAN–EU University Network (AUN)
- ASEM Education Hub and ASEM Duo
- ASEMUNDUS Project (2009–2012: ASEM Education Secretariat/DAAD)
- Asia-Europe Classroom (AEC) initiative
- Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in Singapore
- Asia-Link Scheme and its Higher Education Fairs in Asia
- The EU-Asia Higher Education Platform (EAHEP) and its Higher Education Fairs
- Contemporary Europe Research Centre (CERC), University of Melbourne (until 2009)
- EU-China Academic Network (ECAN); EU-China HE Program (1997–2001) and EU-China European Studies Centers Program (ESCP, from 2003); the new EU-China High-Level People-to-People Dialogue on Education, Culture, Youth and Research (2011)
- European Network for Contemporary Academic Research on India (ENCARI)
- European Studies Program in Vietnam (ESPV, from 2002)

- European Union Studies Program at University Malaya (UMESP)
- European Union Studies Program in the Philippines
- MA Program in European Studies at Chulalongkorn University, Bangkok
- National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), New Zealand

These engagements have granted ASEF recognition by academics and critics as a "high-profile think-tank" (Wiessala 2011).

4.1.4 ASEF as an Expert on Asia-Europe Relations

Having organized over 700 activities over the past 19 years in a vast variety of fields,[8] ASEF is not able to claim expertise in any of those given fields. However, what it aspires to is to be an expert of Asia-Europe relations. Managing such a number of encounters among different interest groups from Asia and Europe and operating on the daily basis between Asia and Europe, ASEF undoubtedly has gained ad hoc experience in interregional communication.

Among the unique initiatives of ASEF, the following gained recognition:

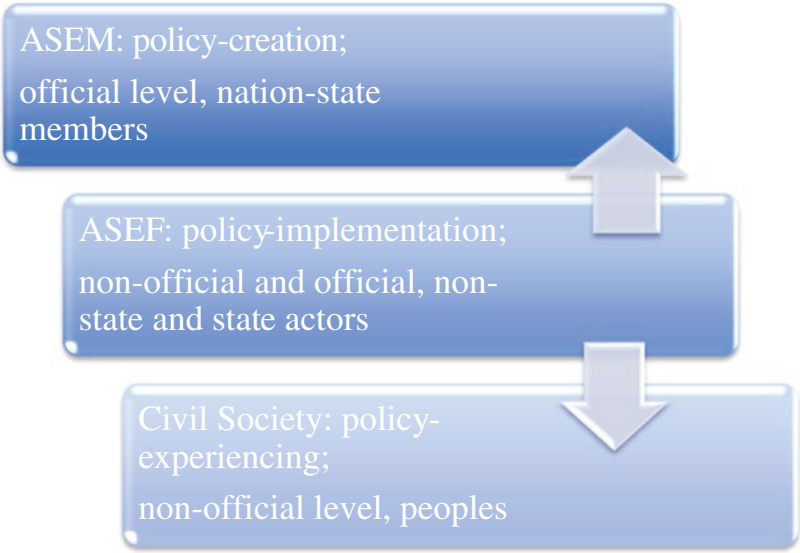
- Asia-Europe Classroom Network (AECN)—the only existing forum between Asia and Europe that engages educators and students, whereas the existing platforms either connect educators only or student exchange only. AECN not only brings educators and students from 46 member countries together but also create opportunities for educators and students to talk to each other too.
- Asia-Europe Journal—one of the most robust examples of intellectual input from ASEF is the inception in 2003 of an academic journal. The Asia-Europe Journal publishes interdisciplinary and intercultural studies and research on Asia and Europe in the social sciences and humanities, and in fact is the first one to be fully dedicated to matters directly involving Asia and Europe from both academic and policy-makers' perspectives. Although ASEF is no longer managing the journal, given that in 2011 it was transferred to Springer, it still gets credits for establishing it.
- Dialogue of Cultures and Civilization (DCC)—has been recognized by both practitioners and academic analysts (Gaens 2008). The DCC is an important contribution not only to the Asia-Europe interregional relations, but also to the global sensitivity of cultural

diversity. In 2003 ASEF launched the first Dialogue of Cultures and Civilizations Program in response to the 4th ASEM Declaration promoting "unity in diversity." As the overall evaluation of the ASEM process on the occasion of the tenth anniversary of its existence (University of Helsinki Network for European Studies 2006, p. 195) reported, the Dialogue on Cultures and Civilizations has not only shown importance in a consensus-building process ahead of the UNESCO declaration on cultural diversity, but it is also a key cross-dimensional topic instrumental in the development of measures to address global security threats. An internal ASEF evaluation on the program was conducted between September 2008 and January 2009, which revealed the perception of participants. Over 70% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that their participation in the program influenced the way they think, as well as their work (ASEF 2009, p. 2). One of the respondents of the evaluation, Ambassador Ong Keng Yong, former ASEAN Secretary General said: "*The most useful thing about the meeting was seeing how others think about the subject and whether there is room for middle ground and balance*" (ASEF 2009, p. 4).

- Asia-Europe Foundation University Alumni Network (ASEFUAN)—is a post-event result of one of ASEF's flagship programs, the ASEF University Program, which facilitates inter-cultural exchange between students from Asia and Europe, running since 1998. The ASEF University Alumni Network was established in 2002, bringing together alumni from the ASEF University Program. ASEFUAN has become an independent non-profit organization continuing the spirit of intercultural dialogue among the young generation of Asia and Europe. ASEFUAN is an example of the continuous impact of ASEF work beyond ASEF activities.

The following graph provides a clear picture of the nature of ASEF's work within the framework of ASEM (Fig. 1).

While ASEM's vision is to serve as a bridge between Asia and Europe, ASEF's role is to serve as a bridge among the member governments' commitments and implementation at the civil societies' level. In such a setting, connectivity in both directions serves a pivotal role. As argued by Gaens (2008, p. 87), ASEF serves a twofold function as a connecting agent or interface between the two regions. First, by acting as a linking agent between civil society, academic institutions, NGOs and



Source: Author's analysis

Fig. 1 Positioning levels of ASEM and ASEF work

professional organizations on the one hand, and Asian and European governments on the other, it ensures that the ASEM process exceeds the purely governmental level. Second, by enhancing interaction between the peoples of the two regions, it aims to foster "information multipliers" who then can further promote awareness and understanding in their own region or field.

4.2 ASEM's Recognition and Endorsement of ASEF

Following all the official statements from the ASEM Summits, ASEF appears to be a successful creation of the ASEM process. From the first Summit that supported the idea of creating the foundation and the second Summit that welcomed ASEF, to all ensuring summits, ASEF is habitually hailed as a recognized vehicle in increasing mutual understanding between the two regions and promoting people-to-people contacts. Asia-Europe relations cannot be further strengthened without building understanding and trust among the peoples, which is done

through dialogue, interaction, and mutual learning at the civil society level (Le Thu 2014). As analyzed above, all three dimensions are directly connected to ASEF's contribution. ASEF cannot take the credit for the achievements of ASEM on its own, because its work is mandated by ASEM. However, ASEM would not have been able to achieve such an outcome if not for the work of ASEF. In other words, being a political forum and a summit of government leaders, ASEM alone cannot fulfill its mission of connecting the regions and engaging the peoples. Such recognition indicates that the role of ASEF is essential for the legitimacy, relevance, and comprehensiveness of the ASEM process.

In recent years, ASEM has recognized that there is a need for a stronger commitment to ASEF's activities among the member countries. There is also a growing realization that ASEF's position in decision-making processes should be strengthened. In the Chair's Statement of the 9th ASEM Summit in Lao PDR (ASEM 2012) in November 2012 one can read:

> Leaders commended the achievement of Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) in promoting mutual understanding between Asia and Europe through intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges during the past fifteen years. They recognized ASEF's active role in promoting Asia-Europe dialogue and cooperation and enhancing visibility of ASEM through effective implementation of its priorities. They also commended ASEF's participation in ASEM Chairman Support Group (ACSG) and its role in the ASEM cooperation. They called on ASEM partners to enhance, through the regularity of their contribution, the financial sustainability of ASEF and encouraged active participation of the new ASEM partners in it.

The recognition of the need to elevate ASEF's position to a higher level of representation in ASEM Summits can be interpreted both ways: (1) recognition of ASEF's contribution to the overall interregional process, and at the same time (2) the limited say that ASEF has had in the top level of ASEM decision-making.

5 Challenges and Limitations

ASEF's limitations reflect those shared by ASEM. ASEM is an institutional framework for Asia-Europe relations, characterized by a high degree of informality and "non-committal negotiations" (Freistein 2008,

p. 223). The cooperation character takes on somewhat different forms in the Asian and European sides, respectively. Asian interstate cooperation is characterized by non-binding, non-committal arrangements, low-key consultations, and informal and personalized meetings (Acharya 2001), whereas European cooperation culture is based on clear, legally binding, and authoritative decisions.

This gap in political culture has posed a serious issue to the process of Europe-Asia dialogue. In multilateral settings, the European output-orientation with fixed and binding rules and norms has on occasion clashed with the Asian dialogue-orientation and preference for informality and non-binding agreements. Since ASEM does not have a physical institution, it is interesting to observe ASEF as the reflection of ASEM. ASEF has been praised for its successes in bridging the people of the two regions and designing joint cooperation projects. During its 19 years of existence, ASEF has contributed immensely to promoting dialogue between Asia and Europe. However, at the same time, just like ASEM, it has been criticized for its elitist nature for reaching out to only certain groups (particularly the middle classes) (Yeo 2002, pp. 10–11). ASEF works within the mandate of ASEM, which is a highly top-down process, and cannot avoid the political nature of its activities. Envisioned to be responsible for cooperation between the civil societies of Europe and Asia, it has struggled with regular obstructions from non-democratic member governments.[9] This reflects the limitations that the condition ASEF's works.

Nevertheless, ASEF has managed to conduct cooperation programs involving non-states actors from both continents in a wide spectrum of fields. This is already a contribution in terms of participation of public in the originally top-down nature of interregionalism within ASEM. The idea of engaging "civil society" also earned tolerance from the Beijing and Hanoi governments after many negotiations, and ASEF managed to organize the conference "Connecting Civil Society of Asia and Europe" in Barcelona in 2004. This displays a slow buy-into some democratic concepts by Asian non-democracies as a result of internationalization, cultural encounters, and the flow of ideas and values. From that perspective, ASEF might serve an important role as a facilitator for the democratization of the Asia-European dialogue (Bersick 2008).

Like any organization, ASEF faces limitations. As indicated elsewhere, there exist many contradictory perceptions of ASEF within the organization, which reflect its identity crisis (Le Thu 2014). Additional

uncertainty about the organization's vision causes a certain deadlock in terms of future direction. Difficulties in communication also appear, to a lesser extent, at the horizontal level, where there are limits in internal coordination among the departments. Partially, it is due to the original structure of thematically divided departments. For more integrated coordination, ASEF operations need to reform toward cooperation based on more crosscutting issues, rather than on department-based work.

Given the high staff rotation,[10] including at the top management level (the appointed term is 3–5 years), the vision of ASEF changes with every new leadership. The personality of leadership heavily affects the overall performance, image, and capacity of the organization. Lack of fixed and lasting regulations or vision statements make ASEF more flexible, dynamic, and open to new input. On the other hand, this is a challenge to maintaining continuity and generating a long-term vision, which forces ASEF to constantly re-define itself.

6 Conclusion

This chapter has analyzed ASEM's cultural cooperation pillar through the activities of ASEF. It has argued that ASEF mirrors the ASEM process with its weaknesses, and ASEM mirrors ASEF in its strengths. Among the positive contributions is the exercise of socialization in a multilateral context. For diplomats seconded to the organization, it is also a training ground that allows them to adjust from unilateral (representing their own country) to a multilateral approach. As much as engaging diversity of actors is a strong asset of ASEF, it can also pose difficulties in terms of the organization's leadership and vision. Multilateral cooperation in such setting of Asian and European nations is relatively new and ASEF represents that learning process. It is a venue, still imperfect but engaging, for collaboration and exchange of ideas among the Asian and European governments and peoples.

ASEF as a communication bridge is another relevant contribution to ASEM processes. ASEF's activities have become a neutral venue effectively connecting not only region-to-region but also Government-to-People and sector-to-sector communication. ASEF has helped large sectors of society to realize the importance of communication and understanding differences. Communication was elevated to a prime level, when looking at the multicultural background of the organization's staff itself, and it determines the effectiveness of ASEF's work. As discovered

from long-term observation, the organization suffers coordination challenges among the various levels of representation within ASEF.

Many of the criticisms that ASEM faces also concern ASEF. The most common issues raised include elitism, being broad but shallow, and having limited impact. These shortcomings often relate to the political conditionality of the Asia-Europe Meeting process itself. The high position of governments and the diplomatic weight in operating ASEF show that the third pillar of sociocultural cooperation has not been separated from, or shall not operate outside of, the political framework. Although ASEF is designated to work on cultural cooperation, it is conditioned by the political agenda and its limitations. These limitations include the funding contributions by political personalities and member states. Given the disparities in funding contributions, ASEF struggles to maintain an equal commitment in the regional and multilateral context alike.

ASEM's strengths are drawn from ASEF's successes. Cultural cooperation is a "signature" interregional cooperation that differentiates ASEM from other regional and trans-regional institutions, and ASEF is at the same time the best product of ASEM endeavor. In the functionality of ASEF, it is a living representation of Asia-Europe relations in various aspects. Despite the limitations this might imply, ASEF is well aware of its responsibilities as a dialogue facilitator. As an interlocutor between governments and civil society of member countries, it creates a safe space for communication that does not alienate any of its partners.

ASEF "only" serves as a house of interaction and it would be unreasonable to expect that understanding between such diverse civilizations would rely solely upon such an organization as ASEF.[11] Keeping this in mind, the criticisms about limited relevance and lack of "binding" results from ASEF activities might no longer be adequate. The results of ASEF's work can only be as effective as the participants want them to be. It is important that Asian and European states and their people have a venue for discussion, for building networks, exhibiting values, and expertise that Asia and Europe can offer each other, searching for issues of common interest, and coming up with policy-recommendations. ASEF itself may not change the nature of cooperation between Asia and Europe, but it can promote the very need of closer and more tangible collaboration. Having provided a platform for communication for 19 years, ASEF has high potential to become a recognized expert in Asia-Europe relations and comparative regionalism studies. Whatever the pros and cons of the contribution of ASEF, it is likely to continue its existence and have its

position on the global map of international and interregional cooperation. While not free from shortcomings, it is unlikely that ASEF's role in sustaining ASEM's relevance will decrease.

Notes

1. Elites here specifically refer to the various civil groups and "third sector" agents who take up the elite role of representation in the ASEF setting.
2. Interview with ASEF representative, June 2012.
3. Details of each of these projects can be found on the ASEF website: http://www.asef.org/index.php/projects/programmes (Last accessed on March 28, 2015) The Perception Studies was launched in partnership with European Studies in Asia, Konrad Adenauer Stiftung, National Center for Research on Europe of Canterbury University, and Fudan University, ASEF has launched a long-term research project on Mutual Perception of Asia and Europe. As a result of it two publications were completed "The EU through the eyes of Asia" and "Asia in the Eyes of Europe". http://asef.org/index.php/projects/themes/education/1148-asia-in-the-eyes-of-europe (Last accessed on November 30, 2012). The above information was confirmed through an interview with an ASEF representative, June 2015.
4. Details of the program: http://asef.org/index.php/projects/themes/environment/2647-asia-europe-environment-forum-in-rio-plus-20 (Last accessed on September 20, 2015).
5. Interview with ASEF representative, June 2012.
6. Interview with ASEF representative, April 2010. The "blame game" refers to the European tendency of criticizing some Asian countries' human rights records.
7. Both volumes, entitled "Facts and Perspectives" and "Connecting Asia and Europe", are available on the ASEF website. http://www.asef.org/pubs/asef-publications/3861-asef-outlook-report-2016/2017.
8. The list of themes and topics of ASEF's work is available on the official website: http://www.asef.org/projects/archive# (Last accessed on November 30, 2016).
9. See for example Bersick (2008), for the case of the People's Republic of China disagreeing on the inclusion of "civil societies" in the ASEM process.
10. Only 5 people stayed longer than 5 years within the organization. Information obtained from ASEF internal documentation; June 2012.
11. Interview with ASEF representative, June 2012.

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CHAPTER 6

ASEM and the People's Involvement: A Focus on the Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP)

Silja Keva

1 Introduction

This chapter explores the development of the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP), a biennial meeting between Asian and European parliamentarians, and assesses it from a threefold perspective: its particular role in the people's involvement in ASEM, its correlation with the ASEM summits, and its functions vis-à-vis national parliaments and individual parliamentarians.

The chapter queries whether parliamentarians are really influencing ASEM or is ASEP just an elite conversation club for politicians, which nobody listens to. Who benefits from the parliamentary dialogue and how? And can ASEP provide a channel for people's involvement in the ASEM process or not?

Despite prolific research on the ASEM process (See Lim 2001; Dent 2004; Gaens 2008; Rüland et al. 2008; Bersick and van der Velde 2011), ASEP and the involvement of parliamentarians in the process remains

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under-researched. Yet, up to 250 parliamentarians from 53 ASEM members meet every alternate year to discuss global issues.[1] So far, ASEP has been mostly assessed within the larger ASEM framework as the research has focused on the big picture of the ASEM-related civil society, parliamentary and business dialogues. Of those researchers who have studied ASEP, Sebastian Bersick (2008) has observed that a political civil society has been emerging in ASEM and that ASEP should be seen as part of this trend. Bart Gaens and Juha Jokela have studied the European Parliament (EP)'s actions in ASEM and state that parliaments and civil society are gradually becoming involved in the process (2012, p. 153). Finally, ASEP has occasionally been mentioned in the context of research on international parliamentary institutions in general or the European Parliament's international activities (see Cofelice 2012; Rüland and Carrapatoso 2015). This chapter provides, hence, the first in-depth analysis of ASEP and its functions.

The research underlying this chapter is based on ASEP Declarations, selected delegation meeting reports (Finland, European Parliament and Japan),[2] expert interviews conducted by the author with ASEM- and ASEP-related officials and politicians, and observation at two ASEP meetings (ASEP4 in 2006a; ASEP8 in 2014), as well as on relevant academic literature and news media.

The chapter starts with an introduction to ASEP and ASEM. This is followed by an introduction to the key concepts related to the people's involvement in global governance, in particular in the context of democratic accountability and the perceived democratic deficit. The chapter subsequently introduces parliamentary responses to global governance and then addresses the issues of accountability and participation in ASEM and finally considers ASEP's potential role in enhancing ASEM's accountability. The chapter concludes by identifying ASEP's challenges and by analyzing its functions vis-à-vis the ASEM Summit, individual parliamentarians, and national parliaments.

2 The Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP)

When the first Asia-Europe Meeting summit took place in Bangkok in (1996), the business community, non-governmental organizations, parliamentarians and trade unions on both sides were eager to connect with their counterparts and to influence the intergovernmental ASEM-dialogue. That same year, civil society actors held the first Asia-Europe

People's Forum (AEPF) in Bangkok, Asian and European parliamentarians met in Strasbourg for the first ASEP meeting, and the business community gathered together at the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) held in Paris. The business forum differs from the other forums in that its idea originated from the ASEM Summit and it has been closely linked to the Summit ever since. The International Confederation of Free Trade Unions also insisted on an official link to ASEM for trade unions, which later materialized as the Asia-Europe Trade Union Forum (AETUF). Initially, parliaments, civil society, and trade unions acted outside the official ASEM process. However, over the years these parallel dialogues have gradually become part of ASEM with the aim of enhancing the people's involvement in the top-level leaders' meetings.

Today ASEP defines itself as "a forum for inter-parliamentary contacts, exchanges and diplomacy among parliaments," which aims "to promote mutual understanding among the people and countries of Asia and Europe" and to "provide a link between parliaments of Asia and Europe and ASEM, and thereby to make an active parliamentary contribution to the ASEM process and in particular to Summit Meetings" (ASEP Rules of Procedure 2006b). The ASEP agenda is very broad and focuses on all major global challenges ranging from food security to organized crime and from educational cooperation to environmental issues.

During its 20-year history, ASEP has developed from a small one-off meeting between the European Parliament (initiator and the host of ASEP1) and nine Asian countries in Strasbourg (1996) to a large biennial conference.[3] After the adoption of the ASEP Rules of Procedure at ASEP4 in Helsinki (2006a), meetings have been regularly organized before each ASEM summit in the host country: ASEP5 in Beijing (2008), ASEP6 in Brussels (2010), ASEP7 in Vientiane (Laos) (2012), ASEP8 in Rome (2014), and ASEP9 in Ulaanbaatar (2016).

3 People's Involvement in Global Governance

3.1 Enhancing Democracy Through People's Involvement?

In the post-Cold War world, globalization and increasing regional integration have transformed the political agendas of national parliaments with an influx of issues that transcend national boundaries like financial crises, environmental hazards and non-traditional security issues (Malamud and Stavridis 2011, p. 102). These issues form the

mainstay of the debate and to some extent also decision-making, at the regional, interregional and global levels in the various global governance institutions. Also, ASEM is part of the global governance framework (Gilson 2011, p. 207). When its 53 members discuss global issues, they represent more than 60% of the world's population and almost 60% of world GDP.

Compared with national governments, which are controlled by an elected parliament, the various international and global governance arrangements have been seen to lack accountability mechanisms and to suffer from democratic deficit (Habegger 2010; Held and Koenig-Archibugi 2005; Brühl and Rittberger 2001). Questions have been raised on who can control and participate in global governance, and to whom the different international fora should be accountable. Based on theories of representative, participatory and deliberative democracy, Bexell et al. (2010, p. 82) recognize accountability and participation as two key elements for the democratization of global governance and support an enhanced involvement of transnational actors. Jan Aart Scholte (2011, pp. 16–24) defines global accountability by positing that "a global governance institution would be accountable to the extent that it is transparent to those affected, consults those affected, reports to those affected and provides redress to those who are adversely affected." In current reality, this is hardly achieved as the way global governance institutions deal with accountability varies significantly.

The parliaments are linked to global governance through their national policy-making processes. This link, however, is long, and influence through governmental delegation is indirect and systematic scrutiny of foreign affairs is difficult for parliaments (Thym 2008, pp. 201–202). Scholte (2011, pp. 26–27) has been critical of national parliaments' performance in examining their own state's action in global governance frameworks, especially outside North America and Western Europe. In the context of ASEP, all the Asian ASEP countries have parliaments, yet most of them are not democracies, and in many the role of the national legislature remains limited.[4]

Non-state actors such as NGOs are even more detached from intergovernmental decision-making as they function outside the government. Direct participation of the people through different interest-driven civil society communities, however, represents a rising new participatory channel at major organizations. The Panel of Eminent Persons on

United Nations—Civil Society Relations (United Nations 2004, pp. 8–9) already in 2004 encouraged such activities. For example, the UN and the European Commission have built channels for the people's involvement through different consultation mechanisms.[5] Civil society actors and parliaments have also started to build their own transnational bottom-up fora (such as ASEP and AEPF), in order to better influence the global agenda-setting and decision-making processes and make their own views heard.

The focus of this chapter is on parliaments, which are not part of civil society, yet have remained distanced from international and global agenda-setting and decision-making like civil society actors. The parliaments' role, which is solid at the national level, thins at the international level. Therefore as Andrea Cofelice (2012, p. 15) notes: at the international level many parliamentary networks have to lobby governments in a similar way as interest groups do.

3.2 International Parliamentary Institutions (IPIs)

The World Conference of Speakers of Parliaments declared in 2000 that national parliaments need to be more involved in the international debate, because in the end it is they who convert the global agenda into domestic laws (IPU 2005, p. 2). Also, the aforementioned United Nation's panel on civil society connections stated that while the substance of politics has quickly globalized, the process of politics is still national in essence, because it's key elements (elections, parliaments and political parties) mainly function at the national level and only have a limited bearing on global governance.

Parliaments have only indirect leverage over foreign affairs through national policy-making channels. However, as Andrés Malamud and Stelios Stavridis (2011, p. 101) describe, in the post-Cold War period, parliaments have increasingly activated in diplomacy for example through visits, study tours, and election monitoring duties. Sometimes parliamentarians have taken independent action in international peace-building activities. A rising channel has been the establishment of international parliamentary institutions (IPIs). Robert M. Cutler (2001, p. 226) notes that as the world has turned from being hierarchical to networked, international parliamentary networks have emerged.

Zlatko Šabič (2008a, p. 258) describes IPIs as "institutions in which parliamentarians co-operate with an aim of formulating their interests,

adopting decisions, strategies or programs, which they implement or promote, formally and informally, in interactions with other actors and by various means such as persuasion, advocacy or institutional pressure." Šabič (2008b, pp. 84–85) further argues thatinter-parliamentary-dialogue makes it possible for politicians to debate and react to the international challenges across borders. Indisputably the most developed IPI is the European Parliament. Other institutions[6] include the global Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Parliamentary Assembly of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE PA), and the Latin American Parliament (Parlatino).

IPIs have further been categorized into international parliamentary organs (IPO), which are organs linked to international organizations[7] and may have specific responsibilities and powers (such as oversight, consultative, budgetary, legislative powers) vis-à-vis the parent organization, EP being a good example. The second, much larger category comprises of the more independent international parliamentary associations (IPAs) (Šabič 2008a, p. 258). ASEP belongs to this latter group because although it is part of the ASEM process, it functions mostly in its own right. Cofelice (2012, p. 8) calls ASEP an emerging interregional parliamentary forum, which does not yet have a permanent character. After 20 years and nine meetings, it should be safe to say that ASEP has turned into a permanent process. Claudia Kissling (2011, p. 54) describes ASEP as an international inter-parliamentary government-run/inspired non-governmental organization (GRINGO), which provides both topics and recommendations to ASEM. Kissling further notes that so long as ASEM remains a loose dialogue process, ASEP cannot be categorized as an organ or agency of ASEM. This definition fits ASEP quite well. Still, ASEP does have more functions, as will be explained later in this article. Also, this description excludes the possibility that even if ASEM remains informal and loose, ASEP and ASEM can still develop a closer interrelationship.

IPIs have been seen as one way to reduce the democratic deficit in global governance, because they provide concrete ways to involve parliamentarians in international relations (Šabič 2008b p. 84; Slaughter 2004, p. 105). IPU (2006) states that IPIs help to overcome the democratic deficit by combining stronger parliamentary oversight at the national level with participation in existing international parliamentary organizations and assemblies at the international level. Cutler (2001, p. 225) notes that IPIs can decrease the democratic deficit, because they facilitate accountability by securing comments from social and

interest groups, perform investigative studies and simply by being elected representatives of the people. On the other hand, Anne-Marie Slaughter (2004, p. 106) notes that many such networks function inefficiently, thus limiting their actual contribution to decreasing the democratic deficit.

4 People's Involvement in ASEM: Focus on the Parliaments

Throughout ASEM's history, the role of people in the process has been controversial. At first, ASEM was considered a top-level process, at times even dubbed elitist. Influence was perceived to trickle down from the top, and not the other way round (Yeo 2003a, p. 3). People were considered beneficiaries of ASEM cooperation, not active participants with their own voice (Robles 2008, p. 35). In official ASEM documents, civil society, NGOs and parliaments were lumped together as "all sectors of society," a compromise from the Asian side that had opposed the inclusion of the word civil society (Bersick 2008, p. 246). Most Asian members feared that bringing up sensitive political issues, e.g. by the AEPF, could hamper a successful dialogue (Yeo 2003b, p. 25). For some European members the civil society actors' stance towards the EU's economic agenda was too critical (Robles 2008, p. 35). European Commission did still at least rhetorically lobby for the engagement of NGOs and parliaments by stating the need to invite parliaments to contribute to the process (EC 2000, 2001) as also did the EP (2002).

Instead, ASEM's only institution, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), was tasked to facilitate people-to-people contacts, mostly at a horizontal level among youth, academia, and artists.[8] Dialogues on sensitive issues were organized through the informal track-two level by ASEF, such as the Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights. Sometimes ASEF's activities were interpreted by NGOs as an attempt to represent Asia-Europe civil society as a whole (Keva 2008, p. 110).

A slow process of official recognition started in 2003, when the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Bali recognized in the Chair's Statement that "in the margins of the ASEM events, host countries may, at their discretion, organize activities with business, think tanks, the academia and other sectors of society." In 2006, the Helsinki Declaration on

the Future of ASEM, issued by ASEM6, emphasized "closer involvement of parliaments, academia and civil society in the broad sense" as a way to enhance ownership, visibility, and awareness of ASEM among the people. At the same summit, the President of ASEP4 was invited by Finland to the ASEM6 Summit in Helsinki for the first time in the process's history. This development was warmly welcomed by partners (Parliament of Finland 2006, p. 14). Two years later at ASEM7 (Beijing 2008) in Beijing though, parliaments were again left out of the summit. However, the summit's Chair's Statement for the first time explicitly welcomed "the constructive role of parliaments, NGOs and the civil society in promoting dialogue among cultures and civilizations and mutual understanding between people of Asia and Europe." The Chair's Statement of ASEM8 in Brussels (2010) identified parallel dialogues to have a valuable role in reaching ASEM's objectives. The leaders tasked ASEM senior officials to take the parallel dialogues' work into consideration and to proceed with appropriate action where relevant. Still, no summit invitation was granted in the subsequent meetings. To sum up, despite this high-level recognition, official and regular contacts or consultations between ASEM and various parallel dialogues are still markedly absent.

ASEM's lack of outreach to civil society and parliaments was already noted early on in the process by observers such as Jürgen Rüland (2001) and Paul Lim (2001). Later, Julie Gilson (2011) in her comprehensive study on the democratic development of ASEM has showed the serious deficiencies in the existing cooperation framework in terms of democratic accountability, a deficit which is possibly even bigger than in many other international institutions because of ASEM's informal, non-binding nature. Gilson (2011, p. 211) notes that ASEM faces challenges in all four areas of accountability: transparency, consultation, evaluation, and correction. In ASEM, unelected civil servants mostly manage the intergovernmental process, and political oversight by national parliaments is limited. Gaens and Jokela (2012, p. 153) argue that the summits' closed-door meeting sessions further decrease ASEM's transparency and accountability.

Gilson (2011, p. 215) divides the ASEM family into "insiders" (ASEF, AEBF and AETUF) and "outsiders," first and foremost the AEPF—a group that has most vocally tried to address ASEM's democratic accountability out of all the parallel dialogue processes. Her focus is on the AEPF and she pays little attention to ASEP. This analysis argues that ASEP should be placed somewhere between the insiders and the outsiders. ASEP appears slightly more encroached within ASEM

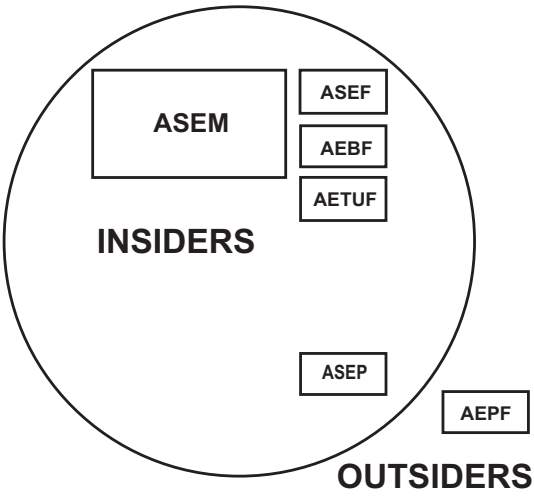

Fig. 1 ASEM family insiders and outsiders

than AEPF, but still plays more of an outsider role than the business community does through the AEBF (Fig. 1).

(Based on Julie Gilson's (2011) categorization, ASEP positioned by the author, figure by the author)

In terms of legitimacy of participation, ASEP is less complex than AEPF. Strictly speaking NGOs represent only certain stakeholders, not the entire Asia-Europe civil society.[9] NGOs may also lack transparency in their actions, and their representatives are not elected by universal suffrage (Scholte 2011, p. 7; Väyrynen 2005, pp. 182–183). Additionally, some NGOs might work very close to national governments, especially in Asia, and may need to limit their own voice, as noted by Alagappa (2004). National parliaments, ideally elected by universal suffrage, have a stronger mandate as the representatives of the people. Nonetheless, their legitimacy too may be questioned. Some participating parliaments on ASEM's Asian side have a limited political role in their home country, and they may not have been elected through fair elections (see e.g. Lam 2014). Still, at ASEP the parliamentary delegations participate as the representatives of their country, also from the point of view of their national government, unlike the various civil society groups participating in AEPF.

AEPF represents a NGO forum, which has caused concern among many of the Asian ASEM governments (Gilson 2011, p. 207). Therefore, ASEP may have been comparatively easier to accept for the ASEM

governments in general because ASEP represents parliaments, which belong to the realm of the state, and because the parliamentarians have been far less ambitious, critical, and vocal in their pleas than the civil society representatives. To demonstrate the different attitude toward ASEP and AEPF, since 2004 each ASEP meeting has been recognized by a high-level address from the prime ministers or cabinet ministers of the host country.[10] In 2004 Vietnam organized ASEP3 where the Vietnamese Deputy Prime Minister opened the conference. At the same time, the Vietnamese government tried to cancel the organization of the AEPF meeting in the country (Bersick 2008, p. 251). AEPF events have faced problems also in China in 2008, where some meetings had to be organized unofficially.[11] Soon after AEPF9 in Vientiane, the opening speaker and activist Sombath Somphone was abducted and still remains missing. In the AEPF meetings, opening addresses are usually made by eminent persons from the academic sector or NGOs, and representation from the government sector is lower. As already noted, it was possible for Finland to invite ASEP to the ASEM summit already in 2006, but not the AEPF.

Cutler (2006, p. 82) has noted that in areas where civil society and NGOs are less developed or may be politically controlled, IPIs can prepare a middle ground for intergovernmental cooperation. This tendency is visible in the way the ASEP-ASEM relationship has developed and how ASEP has been easier for governments to accept than the parallel AEPF.

ASEP itself has not directly talked about accountability, instead ASEP declarations (for example in 2008) quite modestly only call for closer cooperation with ASEM. Being part of the government, members of parliament (MPs) may not regard themselves as outsiders. Also many parliamentarians especially from Asia come from political systems where the legislature works in close contact with the government. For example, in Vietnam or in China the ruling communist party is superior to the executive and the legislature (Lam 2014). Legislatures that operate close to their governments and less independently may have lesser leeway to demand more accountability and involvement to ASEM.

Parliamentarians themselves have rarely used the available opportunities for consultation below the summit level, such as ASEF's informal consultations with civil society, academia, business and government. The first of these "Connecting Civil Society" events was organized in Barcelona (2004). It was considered a success, because its initiative to hold an ASEM Labor Ministers' meeting was picked up by the ASEM

Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2005. Bersick (2008, p. 263) described it at the time as the beginning of participatory democracy in ASEM. Moving away from its exclusive setup, ASEM was able to incorporate input from these parallel dialogues. A similar event was held in Helsinki in 2006 with high-level participants such as the newly appointed UN Secretary General Ki-Moon Ban and 2008 UN Peace Prize Laureate and former Finnish President Martti Ahtisaari. Two years later, the Beijing conference demanded ASEM governments to engage civil society directly in ASEM activities through regularized contact mechanisms and stated that ASEM governments need to become more accountable to their people and especially their parliaments concerning ASEM outcomes (ASEF 2008). The last Connecting Civil Societies conference was organized in 2010 in Brussels after which they have been discontinued. ASEP was never represented at these meetings officially and even individual parliamentary participation was close to non-existent.[12] The reasons may originate from ASEP's internal challenges, such as lack of resources (discussed in detail below) and the fact that there is no designated person to represent ASEP in-between the biennial meetings. These ASEF-conferences could have been a platform for advocacy and policy influence.

In a recent review of ASEM's progress during 2006–2014, it was stated that the success of improved relations between ASEM and ASEP could not be verified because there was no information available (Pelkmans and Hu 2014). This surely reflects the actual lack of progress as well as poor overall visibility and flawed communication between ASEP and ASEM, which will be discussed below.

A significant step was taken at the ASEM10 Summit in Milan 2014. All three parallel dialogues were for the first time invited to the summit, chaired by the European Council, to convey their messages directly to the leaders. The President of the European Council, Herman Van Rompuy (European Council 2014) stated in the closing ceremony: "We welcomed the valuable inputs by the three ASEM fora: parliamentary, business and civil society. They widen the scope of our relationship beyond governments, to include representatives of our citizens and other private actors." This was an important official recognition of the parallel dialogues' output and of the people's role in providing input at the summit level. The practice was continued and even slightly expanded at the summit in Mongolia in 2016, as the political leaders received parliamentarian, youth, business, and civil society stakeholders during the first session of the summit.

For ASEM's outsider groups, the right to participate in the summit has been about formal recognition as well as a pragmatic chance to get access to the leaders in the summit venue, as stated by a Finnish AEPF-related civil society activist.[13] ASEM summits are held with the aim that continuous dialogue at various international institutions would enhance cooperation elsewhere (e.g., the UN, WTO, and G8). Gilson (2002) describes this as ASEM's "minilateral" function whereas Christopher M. Dent (2004) sees ASEM to have "multilateral utility", and Gaens (2015, pp. 9–10) considers ASEM as a "political catalyst." All in all, a chance to influence this dialogue and the global agenda-making process is an important function for civil society and parliaments. Without official recognition or the right to participate in summits, the people's input remains marginal and it is difficult to develop the relationship between ASEM and parallel dialogues further. Gilson (2011, p. 219) sees that also in ASEM "the rhetorical need to recognize and consult with civil society […] has become a sine qua non of global governance proceedings." Yet, the relationship seems to develop very slowly beyond the rhetorical level.

ASEP could help to enhance ASEM's accountability through a system of consultations which would allow deliberation and exchange of information among parliamentarians and ASEM officials, enhance reporting from ASEM to ASEP and increase transparency regarding ASEM's agenda-setting and dialogue. However, achieving correction would be close to impossible because of ASEM's informal nature as noted by Gilson (2011, p. 213).

5 ASEP's Internal Challenges

ASEP's development is not only challenged by its difficult relationship with ASEM, but also by its own internal impediments.

5.1 Political and Economic Diversity

ASEP countries represent a highly diverse group in economic and political terms—45% are emerging economies or developing countries (IMF 2014) including three of the least developed countries in the world: Laos, Myanmar, and Cambodia (UNCTAD 2014). The group also includes some of the world's most advanced economies such as Japan, Singapore, and EU Member States. Often the views of the emerging markets and developing economies clash with those of the rich

developed nations especially in dialogues concerning the multilateral trading system. The majority of the membership comprises of democracies, but there are also authoritarian countries such as China, Laos, Vietnam, and Russia. Nine ASEP-countries are labeled as "not free" and six as "partly free" in the Freedom in the World Report (2014) issued by Freedom House. The diversity of the members' political systems becomes visible in the following areas: agenda, final declaration, and the motivation to develop the process further (see Keva 2017).[14]

ASEP meetings are conducted via preprepared statements, and the EP (2008) has criticized them as "ceremonial," with little possibility for free discussion. However, in the closed declaration drafting sessions, the above-mentioned diversity turns into a positive force allowing controversial issues such as human rights, democracy, rule of law and media freedom to spark up discussion (National Diet of Japan 2006). The EP has criticized China for its negligence of human rights, labor laws, policy in Tibet, and freedom of media (National Diet of Japan 2008). Belgium, Finland, and Japan have tried to push for more ambitious formulations on human rights (National Diet of Japan 2006, 2008, 2010). On the other hand, developing and emerging economies are raising their concerns on the impact of world trade regulations on them (Keva 2017, p. 247). The most controversial issues fail to move beyond the level of statements, albeit sharp ones, to more constructive dialogue. In the end, the final declaration can only represent the lowest, often watered-down common denominator balancing between the different interests of the partners. Stelios Stavridis' (2006, p. 3) claim that MPs are able to speak more freely than diplomats or state leaders is sometimes visible at ASEP too. For example, at ASEP5 a Japanese representative criticized Myanmar's military rule much more openly than has been done in ASEM meetings (Keva 2017, p. 246), yet often times the dialogue remains at the general level.

Many relevant issues are not discussed at all. For example, a discussion on the territorial disputes in the South China Sea was reportedly blocked by China in ASEP8 in Rome 2014 (Suomen eduskunta 2014). The issue has not been on the agenda before either. Russia, however, was reportedly more open to the possibility of discussing the situation in Ukraine at the same meeting (Suomen eduskunta 2014). On the other hand, difficult issues with regional relevance (e.g. freedom of media, abduction of Japanese citizens by North Korea, and China's and Myanmar's human rights issues) have been brought to the table (Keva 2017, pp. 243–246).

It has also been noted that MPs tend to value socialization with colleagues coming from different systems (Stavridis 2002, p. 7). For those interested in the promotion of democratic values and ideals, working with different political systems provides beneficial opportunities for sharing practices and values. The EP (2011) lists inter-parliamentary cooperation as a way to promote democracy. For instance, when Finland assisted Laos in the organization of ASEP7 in 2012, it simultaneously promoted democratic parliamentary practices and norms[15].

5.2 Vicious Circle of Discontinuity, Low Priority, and Visibility

Active ASEP members (those which have participated in six or more out of nine meetings) from Europe are Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Portugal, Spain, the UK and the EP. Those from Asia include China, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Lao PDR, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam. European participation is always higher in conferences held in Europe likely due to financial and time constraints (Keva 2017). Parliamentarians' international activities tend to be easy targets for the media, and for example, EP's international activities have occasionally been dubbed "parliamentary tourism" (Herranz 2005). ASEP provides a valid opportunity to hold bilateral meetings and to foster an international network on the sidelines of the conference. This may be especially important for small countries that have fewer resources for international activities (Keva 2017, p. 249).

For national parliaments, the more established and frequent parliamentary meetings, such as IPU, OSCE PA and ASEAN Interparliamentary Assembly, hold higher priority than ASEP. France, Germany, Singapore, and the UK do not even mention ASEP on their parliamentary websites.[16] In contrast, Japan and Finland profile ASEP as part of their international activity and provide links to most recent ASEP documents. Hosting an ASEP meeting encourages parliaments to take an active stance. Vietnam, Finland, and Belgium have all promoted better working mechanisms for ASEP (Keva 2017, p. 239). Also, the EP has called for better coordination, so far without success (EP 2008; 2014).

The lack of coordination inhibits ASEP from becoming a more efficient tool for parliamentary representation and control. The Rules of Procedure established in 2006 provided much needed organizational framework structure for the process. Subsequent proposals for ASEP's development have

been unsuccessful. Thus, a low level of overall commitment to ASEP, in addition to the political diversity of the members, limits ASEP's development.

Finally, in 2014 ASEP seemed to be taking a step forward. At ASEP8, Italy and Mongolia were tasked to draft the designs for a standing coordination committee, to be discussed in the 2016 meeting. However, members failed to reach a consensus on the matter, and therefore it was not mentioned in the final declaration (EP 2014; Parliament of Finland 2014). The idea was raised by the EP again at ASEP9 in Ulaanbaatar but fell to the objection of Russia and China, which saw that the issue was too major to be discussed without proper preparation (National Diet of Japan 2016). Nevertheless, such a mechanism would allow for interested countries to carry ASEP forward in-between meetings. This mechanism could significantly enhance the now completely absent follow-up. Currently, meetings remain one-time events with very little activity in-between and delegations are convened ad hoc, as confirmed by an interviewed Finnish parliamentary civil servant in 2013. The fact that most delegates participate only once further hampers continuity. Lack of coordination and continuity also leads to low ASEP-identity. A standing coordination committee most likely comprised of at least current and upcoming hosts could help to raise ASEP's priority among parliaments as well as its overall visibility. Such a committee could also conduct regular consultations with the intergovernmental process, for example with ASEM Senior Officials who meet regularly to prepare the ASEM agenda.

ASEP's visibility is low. Not even the leading newspapers of European ASEP host countries such as Helsingin Sanomat in Finland, Corrierra del Sera in Italy or De Standaard[17] in Belgium reported their respective meetings. For example, Helsingin Sanomat (2 September 2006) mentioned the parliamentarians' meeting three months after ASEP convened in Helsinki.[18] Conversely, the People's Daily in China (host of ASEP5 2008) had four articles regarding ASEP in its English language online version (12 August 2014; 3 and 5 October 2012; 19 June 2008). Vietnam Daily News reported on ASEP8 in Rome and ASEP7 in Vientiane Laos (9 October 2014; 4 October 2012).

ASEP is held a few weeks or months before the ASEM Summit and this further hampers visibility. At the time of the parliamentarians' meeting, the upcoming ASEM summit does not figure on the international agenda. If organized simultaneously with ASEM and AEPF, ASEP could receive more attention. AEPF tends to get more publicity thanks to both its better timing and its stronger media strategy. The visibility of each

meeting lies in the hands of the host country's legislature. European countries especially have failed to make the event known to the media. On the other hand, by holding the meeting in advance parliamentarians may have a better chance impacting the drafting of the ASEM agenda.

6 ASEP's Functions: Vertical and Horizontal

6.1 Oversight and Influence

As noted earlier, only a few IPIs hold specific powers or functions vis-à-vis their parent organization. ASEP has no formal powers over ASEM and their interconnection is loose and informal. Actually, in the ASEP Rules of Procedure, oversight of the ASEM process is not listed as part of ASEP's functions. Nevertheless, for example, the EP has accorded this role to ASEP: ASEP "examines the progress achieved within ASEM" (EP 2008).

During the early ASEP process, the EP exercised much of the oversight by analyzing the Commission's ASEM-documents and summit outcomes, and by discussing ASEM-related issues such as human rights, Myanmar's membership and the people's involvement as noted by Gaens and Jokela (2012, p. 155) who also argue that after 2006 the EP weakened its oversight as ASEP became a more institutionalized process with regular meetings and its own role developed. The author of this chapter argues, however, that the overall parliamentary scrutiny of ASEM has actually weakened because ASEP is still not equipped to take over the role of oversight. The EP has a more formal position to assess ASEM within the EU framework, but ASEP lacks both the formal framework with ASEM and the resources to do so.

ASEP meetings do task participating MPs to transfer the ASEP agenda to their national debates and follow up with their respective governments on the issues discussed such as financial control or food security issues (EP 1996; National Assembly of the Lao PDR 2012). This is one of the key functions of ASEP, but its realization is very much dependent on the motivation and resources of individual participants.

The most important channel of communication for ASEP is the final declaration, which is the only public report of ASEP meetings. In the ASEP Rules of Procedure, partners agree that "the outcome of ASEP Meeting shall be communicated to and taken into consideration as

appropriate by the ASEM Summit." Usually this takes place in a separate meeting with a representative of the ASEM host.

Looking at the last two decades of ASEP and ASEM agendas, it can be said that both cover a very broad spectrum of topics and their meeting documents do not differ very much in style. ASEM agendas and Chairman's Statements have been roughly divided into the three original pillars of the ASEM dialogue: political, economic, and other issues (social, cultural, etc.). The ASEM Summit's Chair's Statements, however, are broader and more detailed than ASEP's and contain more issues outside the meeting agenda. As discussed in Keva (2017), the early ASEP agenda focused more on economy but terrorism and security issues also figured on the agenda. Since 2006, the ASEP agenda has focused more on common global challenges such as environmental issues, climate change, food security and financial crises. Some ASEP hosts have even managed to create a focused agenda. For example, ASEP4 in Helsinki in (2006a) focused on climate change and education, ASEP5 in Beijing in 2000 on the WTO Doha Round and dialogue among civilizations, and ASEP8 in Rome in 2014 on economic and financial governance and sustainable growth and food security. All of these issue areas corresponded well with the agendas of the ASEM summits. On the other hand, ASEP7 in Laos in 2012 tried to cover food security, climate change, public debt, and sustainable development.

ASEP declarations call on ASEM countries and ASEM summits to pay attention to issues the parliamentarians consider important (such as food security, sustainable development, and so on). These calls, however, are often very general. In the Beijing (2008) declaration, for example, "ASEP parliamentarians encouraged ASEM countries to work closely in the preparation for the United Nations Climate Conference in 2009." Concrete recommendations are rarely made. In the (2006a) ASEP4 declaration, the parliamentarians tasked ASEM Education Ministers to develop exchange programs for the youth and young professionals. Two years later, Finland noted that the issue had not progressed and ASEP urged ASEM to "redouble" its efforts (National Diet of Japan 2008). Making concrete recommendations for initiatives would require resources for coordination and preparation, which ASEP currently does not have. ASEM statements have never explicitly recognized any single ASEP recommendation or input, although ASEM often discusses the same issues as ASEP does. It is difficult to tell however, whether these

issues were included in the ASEM agenda because ASEP raised them or whether they were already important and topical.

ASEP participants tend to look at the global challenges slightly more from the people's point of view by giving concrete examples of their own national challenges and solutions. A Vietnamese participant stated in ASEP3 that parliamentarians can "turn attention to practical and feasible issues" in the context of cooperation against natural disasters, epidemics, transnational crime, and rights of migrant workers (ASEP 2004). If ASEP wants to be heard, its message should be focused and different from ASEM declarations. As Stavridis (2006, p. 8) notes, parliamentary dialogue should not just be another channel of traditional diplomacy, but should employ its special parliamentary characteristics.

The declarations are largely influenced by the host country, responsible for drafting the agenda and the first version of the declaration. In 2010 in Brussels, the declaration placed a strong emphasis on human rights. When Vietnam hosted ASEP3 in 2004, the agenda featured world trade issues from the point of view of an emerging economy.

Finally, ASEP can also influence the ASEM agenda through national political channels. ASEM Summit agendas are circulated among governments a few months prior to the summit at the level of senior officials, where parliamentarians could impact the drafting of the agenda through official or personal contacts. For example, Finland has set up an ASEP working group with parliamentarians and ministry officials to exchange information on ASEM/ASEP in-between summits.

6.2 Empowering MPs and National Legislatures

At the horizontal level ASEP serves many different purposes by creating a space for interparliamentary discussion and raising awareness of each other's interests. As Šabič (2008a, p. 77) notes, IPIs "provide a venue for parliamentarians to stimulate public debate on issues of regional/global governance and to facilitate the development of shared norms and values in an increasingly integrated world." ASEP, as the only joint platform for Asian and European parliaments, carries out this kind of function. By discussing not only Asia-Europe issues but also common global challenges, ASEP facilitates the building of shared norms and values (Keva 2017, p. 250). Kimmo Kiljunen (2006, p. 250) argues that "participation in international forums facilitates the parliamentarians' access to global information and knowledge and reinforces their ability to fulfill

their domestic mandate." This emphasizes how the IPIs can work in two ways: not only do they try to influence the international agenda and bring a people's voice to it, but they influence the MP's work at home by providing a broader view to common challenges (Kissling 2011, p. 32; Slaughter 2004, p. 237; Cofelice 2012, p. 13). In the recent ASEP meetings, the hosts have introduced a custom of inviting experts to brief politicians on current themes such as climate change in ASEP4 in 2006a or world economic governance structures in Brussels 2010. In addition, representatives of UNDP, UNISDR, and EuropeAid have been invited as guests. At ASEP, participants highlight their own role as legislators and remind each other how they should influence national legislative processes (ASEP 2010). This competence-building character is especially important for countries in which national legislatures have recently shown a tendency for greater autonomy as in Vietnam and China, or are taking steps toward democratization such as Myanmar. Also, an interviewed Finnish MP notes that the educational and norm-setting potential of ASEP is very important.

6.3 ASEP and the Asia-Europe Civil Society

ASEP and AEPF have very limited horizontal contacts with each other and seem to be rather unfamiliar with each other's activities.[19] ASEP supports a stronger role for the civil society forum within the ASEM process (ASEP4 2006a) and has highlighted the role of civil society and NGOs in the context of dialogue among civilizations (ASEP5 2008). The support, however, has not always come out very strong as an unambitious declaration from ASEP6 (2010) shows: "ASEP Parliamentarians appreciated the fact that a permanent goal of ASEM is to bring an ever growing number of business travelers, tourists, academicians, students, opinion makers, civil society representatives and local and regional leaders to know and understand each other better." AEPF has twice participated in ASEP meetings (2006b in Helsinki and 2010 Belgium).

7 Conclusions

The first 20 years of the ASEP process show a cautious trend toward institutionalization, which has led ASEP to become an established international parliamentary institution and a recognized part of the ASEM family. ASEP is a vehicle for the people's participation in Asia-Europe

relations through their elected MPs. ASEP has provided a special middle ground for Asia-Europe dialogue, between the intergovernmental and the people-to-people level and has thus been more easily welcomed by ASEM governments. Over the years, ASEP has streamlined its agenda and managed to stay sufficiently interesting for a large number of countries. ASEP has tried to provide input to ASEM summits and draw the attention of leaders to issues parliamentarians consider important.

However, ASEP has not been very efficient in its activities. There are many European countries that rarely take part in ASEP (e.g., Sweden) and the declarations do not really differ from ASEM summit documents. Finally, the link between ASEP and ASEM remains weak. ASEP meets only once every 2 years and the same MPs rarely participate twice in the meetings, therefore the process has very little continuity and it is difficult for the parliamentarians to follow-up on ASEM and ASEP-related issues.

Over the years ASEM has started to recognize ASEP in the Chairman's Statements, in the form of high-level political addresses and three invitations to ASEM summits. But has ASEM lived up to the promises made at ASEM4 and ASEM6 to work for closer involvement of parliaments into the process or has ASEM utilized ASEP's potential for broadening the outreach of ASEM? There seems to be very little evidence that would show a real deepening of the ASEM-ASEP relationship. There are many reasons for this: ASEM's informal nature and focus on dialogue combined with its elitist history have not encouraged stronger communication channels to parallel dialogues. Simultaneously, ASEP's own challenges, lack of coordination and priority as well as diverse membership, have kept the ambition level in ASEP relatively low. The reality is that a setting such as the OSCE's,[20] for example, which has more established communication channels with its parliamentary assembly (see Habegger 2010), would require a lot more organizational resources from both ASEM and ASEP, which neither of them have and which are not foreseeable in the near future. Yet, the OSCE parliamentary assembly also operates mostly informally, without any formal, legally binding obligations. All in all, it can be said that ASEP is part of the ASEM family; however, it is a family that does not have very close relations among its members.

The next step would be to create a regularized consultation mechanism between ASEP and ASEM. As Mongolia decided to invite the parallel dialogues to ASEM11 in 2016, which also celebrated the 20th

anniversary of ASEM, it will be extremely difficult for future hosts, especially those in Asia, to ignore the custom anymore. For Mongolia, this has offered an excellent opportunity to portray itself as an open society. After the issue of participation becomes permanently solved, ASEP and ASEM can focus better on deepening their bilateral relationship. If ASEP in the future will adopt the aforementioned standing committee, it could in the long run lead to a more regularized consultation and contact mechanism with ASEM. This would enhance the democratic aspect of ASEM, as it would increase participation, transparency and accountability of ASEM.

Without a working two-way relationship with ASEM, parliamentarians run the risk of remaining as a "decorative" IPI. Instead, ASEP should aim to be at least a "reactive" one.[21] Or better yet, a proactive one with its own message. This, however, is difficult given the limited institutional resources and great variety of members both ASEM and ASEP have. ASEM especially needs to recognize ASEP in a new way. A standing committee could let interested countries take the lead in line with the recent ASEM focus on tangible cooperation with opportunities for issue-based leadership (see e.g. Gaens 2015, p. 9).

For parliamentarians ASEP, like other IPIs provide a parallel interparliamentary fast track to the global level. For ASEM it has the potential of providing a channel for the people's involvement through their national legislatures.

Can ASEP reduce ASEM's perceived democratic deficit, enhance participation and increase its accountability? In principle ASEP is well equipped to present the people of ASEM countries. Consultation with parliaments would enhance ASEM's accountability by allowing a chance for more transparent and responsive dialogue and facilitate ASEM's evaluation by the parliaments. Closer dialogue could also help ASEM governments to channel ASEM-related topics to the debates of the national parliaments, and thus enhance ASEM's weight and visibility. Finally, the parliamentarians' input would strengthen the people's view in the ASEM dialogue. ASEP cannot solve ASEM's democratic deficit problems alone. The relationship with the civil society should also be developed. ASEP and AEPF are not competing but complementary fora with a similar objective, increasing the people's involvement in ASEM, and could together, with the business as well as the trade unions, build a more deliberative framework for ASEM. As argued by Raimo Väyrynen (2005, pp. 184–185), there is no single solution to fill the democratic deficit,

because the democratization of global governance requires different processes.

At the moment the people's participation ASEP brings to ASEM is limited and rather superficial and it remains to be seen whether the developments in ASEP's own institutionalization and ASEM's readiness to include the parallel dialogues into summits could lead to change in this aspect in the future.

Notes

1. Of the 53 ASEM partners ASEAN Secretariat does not participate in ASEP meetings. National delegations vary in size, 1–3 delegates per country.
2. They represent active participants from both Europe and Asia and were accessible for research purposes. The reports published by the National Diet of Japan are detailed transcriptions of the meeting discussions and procedures, whereas reports from Finland and the EP are more general summaries. While these reports carry national/regional and personal motivations and interpretations, together they paint a useful and comprehensive picture of the meetings.
3. Despite the EP's efforts after ASEP1, the parliamentarians did not convene parallel to ASEM2 (London 1998) and ASEM 3 (Seoul 2000).
4. For more on Asian parliaments see Zheng et al. (2014)
5. For example, European Commission Civil Society Dialogue on trade; open consultations through "Your Voice in Europe"; and the consultative status for NGOs to the UN. For a review of democratization processes of international organizations see Patomäki and Teivainen (2003).
6. There are currently over 100 IPIs (Kissling 2011, p. 10)
7. Šabič bases this categorization on definitions by Lindeman and Klebes (quoted in Šabič 2008a, p. 258).
8. ASEF organized its own Asia-Europe Young Parliamentarians Meetings until 2007, but they focused on horizontal networking.
9. See for example the critique by Rüland (2001, p. 68). AEPF claims not to be the civil society representative, but rather to bring up issues that concern civil society (Bersick 2008, p. 250).
10. ASEP4 Helsinki (2006a): Prime Minister of Finland Matti Vanhanen; ASEP5 Beijing 2008: Foreign Minister of the People's Republic of China Yang Jiechi; ASEP6 (2010) Brussels: Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belgium Steven Vanackere and President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy; ASEP7 Vientiane 2012: Prime Minister of the Lao DPR Thongsing Thammavong. However, in ASEP8 in Roma 2014

only an Undersecretary of State from the Italian Ministry of Foreign Affairs Mr. Benedetto Vella Vedova was present; ASEP9 (2016) President of Mongolia Tsakhia Elbegdorj.

11. Interview conducted by the author in 2015.
12. As an exception the 2006 event was held at the Parliament's premises in Helsinki. The EP and Finnish Parliament were represented (ASEF 2006).
13. Interviewed by the author in 2015.
14. For a comprehensive analysis on the effect of political and economic diversity on ASEP dialogue see Keva (2016).
15. Interview with a Finnish parliamentary civil servant in 2013.
16. Spain lists ASEP as an interparliamentary visit to which the country has been invited.
17. Based on a review of the newspapers' online databases. De Standaard had one opinion piece about ASEP7 by Rik Torfs, the Head of the Belgian ASEP delegation.
18. Articles related to the ASEM6 summit totaled 75 in the Helsingin Sanomat (Gaens 2008, p. 164).
19. The author asked key AEPF representatives to comment on ASEP, but failed to get responses, one respondent claimed he did not know ASEP well enough to respond.
20. OSCE PA has been referred to as one the most influential parliamentary assembly (Marshall 2005, p. 41; quoted in Habegger 2010, p. 87.)
21. Terms borrowed from Costa, Dri and Stavridis (2013, p. 240).

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CHAPTER 7

ASEM'S Media Exposure and the Promotion of Connectivity Between Asian and European Publics

Suet-Yi Lai

1 Introduction

ASEM has been the prime forum for dialogue and cooperation between Asia and Europe. Since its inception, one of its main objectives has been to "build a greater understanding between the people of the two regions" (Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework 2000; ASEM 1996). Progressively, ASEM has been endeavoring to engage non-state actors into the process by gradually adding a bottom-up aspect to ASEM. ASEM's Track Two (the unofficial track in which key participants are non-governmental, as distinguished from the official track which encompasses only government representatives) was established to increase the participation of members of civil society and to help ASEM improve its public profile and awareness. Accordingly, this chapter first and foremost

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seeks to assess ASEM's achievements in its first 2 decades in the promotion of mutual awareness between the people of Asia and Europe.

Despite its presence and work in the past 2 decades, public awareness of ASEM remains remarkably low. Meanwhile, the process has been struggling to stay relevant among the general public concerned as well as in the international cooperation structure. Since ASEM's third summit in Seoul in 2000, fostering the visibility and awareness of ASEM among the wider public and increasing the profile of Europe in Asia, and conversely of Asia in Europe, have been important objectives of the process. However, ASEM's focus on informal dialogue, the absence of major goals such as those adopted by other interregional organizations or groundbreaking interregional agreements a priori limit the amount of public and media exposure. Accordingly, this chapter explores the actual meaning of public profile and awareness for a forum like ASEM. Subsequently, it points out possible new directions for the process to stay relevant to its general public and the wider international arena.

Some observers have labeled ASEM as "too elitist" and "too bureaucratic" even after the establishment of the Track Two process (Lim 2001, p. 2; Yeo 2002, pp. 10–11; Yeo 2004, p. 21; Reiterer 2004, p. 17; Rüland 2006, p. 60; Bersick 2008, p. 254). This chapter, however, seeks to provide a more comprehensive analysis of ASEM's engagement with non-state actors. This assessment of ASEM's outreach includes both the quantity and the quality of profile promotion, while keeping in mind that quantity does not necessarily bring quality. While the international stage is filled with a plethora of high-level summits and multilateral meetings, the race for visibility is increasingly difficult. In this context, the chapter argues that visibility should not be the final goal of fora such as ASEM.

In terms of theoretical analysis, this chapter examines both the constructivist perspective and the institutionalist perspectives of the ASEM process. Applying social constructivism, the chapter assesses whether ASEM has changed the mutual perception between Asia and Europe, that is, whether ASEM has helped narrow the psychological distance and promotes mutual appreciation between Asia and Europe. From an institutionalist perspective, this chapter explains how ASEM's institutional design limits its engagement with the constituent actors and functions.

The chapter starts by introducing the methodology of the empirical part, followed by a concise overview of ASEM's efforts to increase its public visibility. The ensuing sections assess in detail ASEM's achievements in promoting mutual awareness between the people of Asia and

Europe as well as of its own public outreach. The final section concludes that interaction within the ASEM process remains reserved to high politics in which the domestic public remains largely irrelevant, after which it offers several policy recommendations for ASEM.

2 Methodology

In order to incorporate a diversity of perspectives, this research employs two methods of data collection and analysis in assessing ASEM's visibility: content analysis of news coverage of ASEM and public opinion surveys. Each primary data set generated provides a perspective complementary to the other.

Media analysis here refers to a systematic counting, assessing, and interpreting of the form and substance of news items referencing "Asia-Europe Meeting"/"Asia-Europe Summit"/"ASEM." Apart from being unobtrusive, content analysis is a reliable research method in which errors can be identified and corrected. Moreover, a longitudinal study is possible as long as raw data is available. This research collected and analyzed news items featuring ASEM from 1996 (ASEM1) to 2014 (ASEM10). Seven English-language dailies, each from a different location on the ASEM's Asian side, plus one daily from the UK were chosen for monitoring (see Table 1). Different locations are included to diversify the source of information as well as to facilitate cross-country comparisons.

It cannot be denied that English-language dailies are not the most widely circulated press in China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Thailand, where English is not the native language. Also, their target readership may not be the local community, as compared to English-language newspapers in the UK, the Philippines and Singapore. Nevertheless, owing to language limitations, this research can only rely on English-language newspapers in all locations in order to generate a cross-country data set for comparison. Indeed, educated elites (including students) and foreigners (either residing in an Asian location, or following local events from abroad) typically read English-language dailies in China, Japan, South Korea, Indonesia, and Thailand. These English-language dailies are also read by media professionals from outside the locality as a guide for external newsmakers in reporting domestic current events. Due to the profile of their readership and staff, English-language dailies in the Asian locations examined create a unique forum for exchange of ideas on regional and international developments. Additionally, most of the

Table 1 English-language dailies monitored

Locations	*Dailies chosen*	*Founded*	*Circulation*	*Timeframe*	*Number of ASEM-related news collected*
China	*China Daily*	1981	900,000[a]	ASEM1–ASEM10	90
Japan	*Japan Times*	1897	45,000[b]	ASEM4–ASEM10	16
South Korea	*Korea Herald*	1953	50% market share[c]	ASEM2–ASEM10	223
Singapore	*Strait Times*	1845	365,800[d]	ASEM1–ASEM10	192
Thailand	*Bangkok Post*	1946	1st in Thailand[e]		256
Indonesia	*Jakarta Post*	1983	55,000[f]		81
Philippines	*Manila Bulletin*	1900	n/a	ASEM5–ASEM10	55
UK	*The Guardian*	1821	187,000[g]	ASEM1–ASEM10	27

[a]*Source China Daily* official website, About Us, http://www.chinadaily.com.cn/static_c/gyzgrbwz.html (accessed 6 May 2015).
[b]*Source* as of 2013, according to the official website of *The Japan Times*, it has been the 'largest circulation of all domestic English-language newspapers in Japan and reaches by far the largest number of non-Japanese readers living in Japan.' See http://jto.s3.amazonaws.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/jt-inyt-media-information-englishv2.pdf (accessed 6 May 2015).
[c]*Source Korea Herald's* official website, The *Korea Herald* occupies over 50% of Korea's English newspaper sector' and is Korea's 'top English-language newspaper'. Source: *Korea Herald* official website, Business, http://company.heraldcorp.com/sec_index.php?nlm=1&nsi=4 and http://www.koreaherald.com/view.php?ud=20120813001212 (accessed 6 May 2015).
[d]*Source The Strait Times*' official website, About Us, (accessed 6 May 2015) www.straitstimes.com/STI/STIMEDIA/sp/html/customercare/customercare.html?id=0.
[e]*Source* official website of *Bangkok Post*, *Bangkok Post* is 'Thailand's number one English-language news media', see http://www.bangkokpost.com/partner and http://www.postpublishing.co.th/annual-report/annual2014/AnnualReport2014_ENG_FINAL.pdf (accessed 6 May 2015).
[f]*Source* Publicitas, Jakarta_Post, 2014, http://www.publicitas.com/fileadmin/uploads/hongkong/Factsheets/2014/Print/Jakarta_Post_2014.pdf (accessed 6 May 2015).
[g]*Source* audience, the Guardian, 2010, http://www.theguardian.com/advertising/guardian-circulation-readership-statistics (accessed 6 May 2015).

papers selected are the longest established and most prestigious in their respective countries.

Regarding data collection, the search for news items was based on an online news archive, FACTIVA.[1] It was chosen because of its massive collection of sources, user friendliness and free access available to the author. However, it was found that reportage from several of the chosen news outlets was not complete. For instance, news from *Korea Herald* published before 1998 was not available on FACTIVA and the paper's official online archive is not available in English. Also, news published by

Table 2 Periods of media data collection

Summit	*Period for news analysis*	*Number of news items found (number of dailies included)*
ASEM1	1 February–9 March 1996	202 (5)
ASEM2	3 March–11 April 1998	115 (6)
ASEM3	20 September–28 October 2000	199 (6)
ASEM4	23 August–1 October 2002	49 (7)
ASEM5	8 September–16 October 2004	63 (8)
ASEM6	10 August–18 September 2006	70 (8)
ASEM7	24 September–1 November 2008	103 (8)
ASEM8	4 September–12 October 2010	40 (8)
ASEM9	5 October–13 November 2012	70 (8)
ASEM10	16 September–24 October 2014	40 (8)
Total		951

Japan Times and *Manila Bulletin* before July 2002 and December 2002 respectively were not available on FACTIVA. Two other online news archives—Press Display and Wise News—were also checked. However, news from *Korea Herald, the Japan Times* and *Manila Bulletin* between 1996 and 2012 were still not complete. Consequently, these three dailies could only been included partially in this research (see Table 1).

Research experience from *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific*[2]—a research project of the National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, New Zealand—showed that media's attention on the ASEM process concentrated overwhelmingly around the several weeks before, during, and after the official summit. Hence, this data set concentrated on "peak" periods of ASEM's media coverage—one month before the ASEM summit to one week after the two-day summit. Based on this methodology, a total of 951 news items were collected and analyzed (Table 2).

All news items collected were analyzed both quantitatively and qualitatively. They are coded under various aspects of each news report including the following: length of each news item, source of information, centrality (whether ASEM is the main, secondary, or minor focus of the news); evaluation (whether ASEM is reported positively, neutrally or negatively); the actors (individual countries, national leaders, regional organizations or non-state actors) and the relevant actions mentioned

(political, economic, social, environmental, or development). The coding was recorded on a standardized Excel template.

In order to diversify the source of insight in this research, it also employed primary data generated by several public opinion surveys to illustrate how the general public receive and conceive the establishment and development of the ASEM process. Surveys reveal perceptions, opinions, attitude, and behavioral reports of the general public. The results provide an "accurate snapshot of conditions or opinions at the time the survey was carried out" (Burnham et al. 2008, p. 137).

High costs involved in a survey mean that it is impossible for an individual researcher to conduct a large-scale public opinion survey. Fortunately, this research received access to the primary findings of two comparative projects, *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* and its "mirror" project *Asia in the eyes of Europe*,[3] both of which incorporated public opinion survey components. Each survey had two questions related to the perceptions of ASEM, and the responses to these questions constituted the primary data used in this chapter.

The public survey data used in this research are extracted from surveys conducted in 2008 (in Indonesia, the Philippines, and Vietnam), 2010 (in India, Macau, and Malaysia), and 2012 (mainland China, India, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand), where identical questionnaires were used. The project hired professional social research companies to conduct these surveys. Face-to-face interviews were conducted in Indonesia, while online-panel structured interviews were conducted in the other Asian locations. In total, the data set included 9448 completed surveys (Table 3).[4]

Two questions from *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* survey informed this chapter:

- Question 9: Are you aware of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Process?
- Question 10: Which of the EU countries do you have personal or professional connections/ties with?

The "mirror" project *Asia in the Eyes of Europe* covered eight EU member states (Austria, Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Italy, Romania and the UK). Its public opinion survey was completed in June–August 2010 and used online-panel structured interviews. Again, the project hired a professional social research company to conduct the survey, with

Table 3 Sample sizes of the Asian public survey in 2008, 2010, and 2012

Locations	*Date*	*Number of respondents*
Indonesia	November 2008	405
The Philippines		400
Vietnam		400
India	February 2010	403
Macau, China		400
Malaysia		400
Mainland China	March 2012	1009
India		1028
Japan		1000
South Korea		1002
Malaysia		1000
Singapore		1000
Thailand		1001
Total		**9448**

Table 4 Public opinion sample in eight EU member states

EU member states	*Population in 2011*[a] *(million)*	*Number of respondents*
Austria	8.40	496
Belgium (French-speaking area)	10.95	224
Belgium (Flemish-speaking area)		368
Denmark	5.56	293
France	65.05	906
Germany	81.75	1033
Italy	60.63	930
Romania	21.41	451
UK	62.44	1454
Total	–	6155

[a]*Sourcing from Eurostat* http://epp.eurostat.ec.europa.eu/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&language=en&pcode=tps00001&plugin=0 (accessed 3 January 2012).

sample sizes varying from country to country to reflect the composition of the population of the EU (Table 4). In total, the data set profiled 6155 completed interviews.[5]

Questions were posed to the respondents in the native language of each location. Two ASEM-focused questions were:

- Question 6a: How familiar are you with the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (options: not familiar at all, not very familiar, quite familiar or very familiar)?
- Question 7: With which of the following countries (listed below) do you have personal or professional links with?

Apart from the public opinion data set, this chapter also consulted media analysis results of *Asia in the Eyes of Europe*. This data set consists of a three-month analysis of three media outlets[6] in the eight EU countries monitored. The search period was September to November 2010, which covered the period of peak coverage of ASEM (4 September–12 October 2010), while "ASEM" was among the Asia-related search terms used.[7] For this chapter, only the data dated between 4 September and 12 October 2010, which mentioned ASEM, are extracted.

In order to obtain a comprehensive understanding of the ASEM process, a combination of data collection and data analysis methods is employed in this research. All empirical data employed here are primary. They generate a unique set of empirically rich data and ensure the validity of this research. Thus, this research does not only add to the existing work on ASEM—which is based mainly on indirect observations and theoretical deductions—but also presents the most comprehensive set of empirical findings on ASEM ever collected.

3 An Overview of ASEM's Visibility-Promoting Efforts

Before assessing the results of ASEM's visibility-promoting efforts in its first two decades, it is necessary to review the exact initiatives taken. The first and most developed one has been the establishment of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) to promote mutual understanding between Asia and Europe at the level of citizens within the ASEM framework. Until 2016, ASEF has implemented over 700 projects including flagship programs namely ASEF Summer University, ASEF Public Health Network, and Culture 360 (see Chap. 4).

After the Seoul Summit, ASEF was commissioned to hold an ASEM Logo Competition in 2001–2002. The ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting (FMM) in 2003 announced the winning design and adopted the permanent logo for the ASEM process. It was expected that the use of a visual symbol for ASEM would reduce confusion (instead of having each member create a new logo for different ASEM activities) and

boost a common identity among ASEM members. A common logo is also expected to help ASEM to build a distinct corporate identity.

In the sixth FMM in 2004, in order to improve the day-to-day management and information systems, ASEM partners agreed to establish an "Information Board." As a result, ASEM's official website, the ASEM InfoBoard,[8] was set up as a one-stop information platform of the process. As ASEM does not have a secretariat, ASEF serves as administer and manager of the ASEM InfoBoard. In today's internet age, having an official website is indeed a basic requirement to engage with the general public and to disseminate information.

On ASEM's tenth anniversary, the 2006 Helsinki summit identified low visibility as an obstacle for the ASEM's successful public outreach and adopted four recommendations in the "Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM" to boost ASEM's visibility, public awareness, and links with stakeholders.

This was followed by another round of profile-promoting initiatives, including a workshop on visibility held in November 2007. Leaders at ASEM7 mandated senior officials to coordinate cultural activities for the enhancement of ASEM visibility. Being the sole regular coordinator and institutional memory of ASEM (as other regional coordinators are rotation-based), the European Commission has been a prime mover of these initiatives. It set up and sponsored the ASEM Visibility Toolkit in 2009, the ASEM Visibility Support Project, as well as the Technical Assistance Team for ASEM Coordination in 2010 and the ASEM Dialogue Facility Support in 2012. The Delhi FMM11 in November 2013 once again called for higher awareness and visibility of ASEM among non-state actors. It annexed in the Chair's Statement a list of topics for discussion on ASEM's Press/Public Awareness Management Strategy, identifying 19 ideas to boost visibility of the process.[9] ASEM has thus implemented a series of efforts to promote its own visibility and public awareness. The following section assesses the results of these efforts with the support of several substantial empirical datasets.

4 Empirical Findings: Reporting on ASEM in the Press

This research collected and analyzed a total of 951 news items that mentioned ASEM. From the five dailies monitored in the "ASEM1 period," 202 pieces of news were found mentioning ASEM (Table 5).

Table 5 Number of ASEM news items collected in each monitored daily

	China Daily	*Japan Times*	*Korea Herald*	*Jakarta Post*	*Straits Times*	*Bangkok Post*	*Manila Bulletin*	*Guardian*	Total
ASEM1	1	n/a	n/a	21	60	118	n/a	2	202
ASEM2	0	n/a	21	9	47	21	n/a	17	115
ASEM3	8	n/a	148	7	17	17	n/a	2	199
ASEM4	7	2	14	2	8	15	n/a	1	49
ASEM5	8	2	7	8	9	14	12	3	63
ASEM6	12	4	4	5	18	9	18	0	70
ASEM7	28	3	10	14	17	22	9	0	103
ASEM8	6	5	9	3	6	8	3	0	40
ASEM9	13	0	3	11	9	22	11	1	70
ASEM10	7	0	7	1	12	10	2	1	40
Total	90	16	223	81	203	256	55	27	951

Noteworthy, although the number of monitored dailies increased to six (including *Korea Herald*) for the "ASEM2 period," the volume of ASEM-related news items was only half of that of ASEM1. Coverage of the Seoul Summit peaked at 199 news items, followed by rather low media attention on ASEM4 through to ASEM6. The Beijing ASEM Summit in 2008 marked a return of media attention, with 103 news articles collected from eight newspapers. The coverage stayed low for ASEM8, ASEM9, and ASEM10. There has been a clear drop of media interest in ASEM among the monitored newspapers in terms of absolute number of news articles.

Media attention given to the ASEM summit has therefore witnessed a significant decline after ASEM3. An exception was 2008 ASEM summit in Beijing—the first large-scale summit after the outbreak of the global financial crisis—which attracted much more attention than the two previous meetings. Recent summits held in Milan (2014) and Brussels (2010) received the lowest media attention, with only 40 news items each in total gathered from eight dailies. All monitored news outlets except *China Daily* shared this trend. The Chinese paper demonstrated no interest in covering ASEM before ASEM3. The volume of ASEM coverage then sustained an average of eight pieces, while reportage of ASEM7 (held in Beijing) recorded a spike (Fig. 1).

Another finding is that Asian media paid more attention to ASEM meetings taking place in Asia. The odd number editions of ASEM Summits are always reported more than the even number editions, which

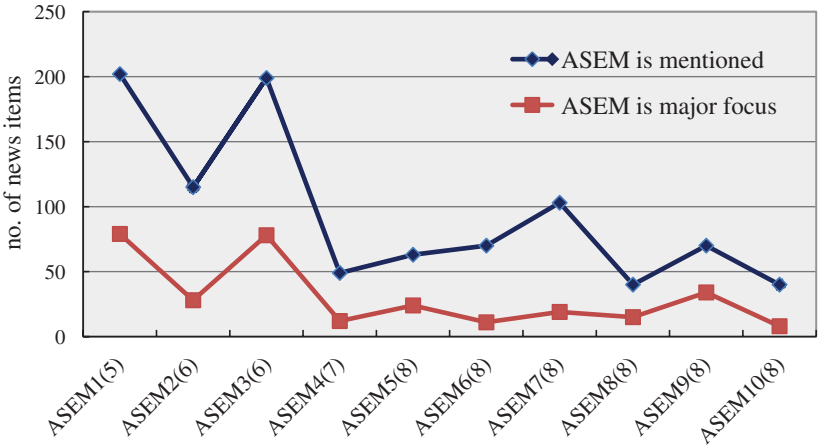

Fig. 1 Volume of total news items mentioning ASEM in each of the 10 summit periods and volume of news items in which ASEM was the major focus

take place in Europe (see Fig. 2). Media always pay more attention to issues closer to "home," hence it is unsurprising that they see ASEM summits less relevant when they take place in Europe. Such "home" effect is also found in *the Guardian*, which mainly reported on ASEM2 hosted by the UK in 1998. Its zeal for reporting on the forum has echoed the interests in ASEM of the UK government, which has stopped sending head of government representation to the ASEM summits since the fourth edition.[10]

Comparing across the news outlets, cumulatively, *Bangkok Post* from Thailand, *Korean Herald* from South Korea and *Straits Times* from Singapore rendered the highest overall attention to ASEM summits. On the other hand, coverage in *Japan Times* was significantly lower. It is noteworthy that the *Bangkok Post* and *Korean Herald* concentrated mainly on the specific summit their respective country hosted. *Bangkok Post* recorded 118 pieces of news on ASEM1, while 148 news items on ASEM3 were found in *Korean Herald*. The visibility of ASEM in *China Daily* also peaked during ASEM7, though it was still low compared with the coverage of ASEM1 in *Bangkok Post* or of ASEM3 in *Korean Herald*. As the initiating country of the ASEM process, interest in ASEM has been sustained in Singapore.

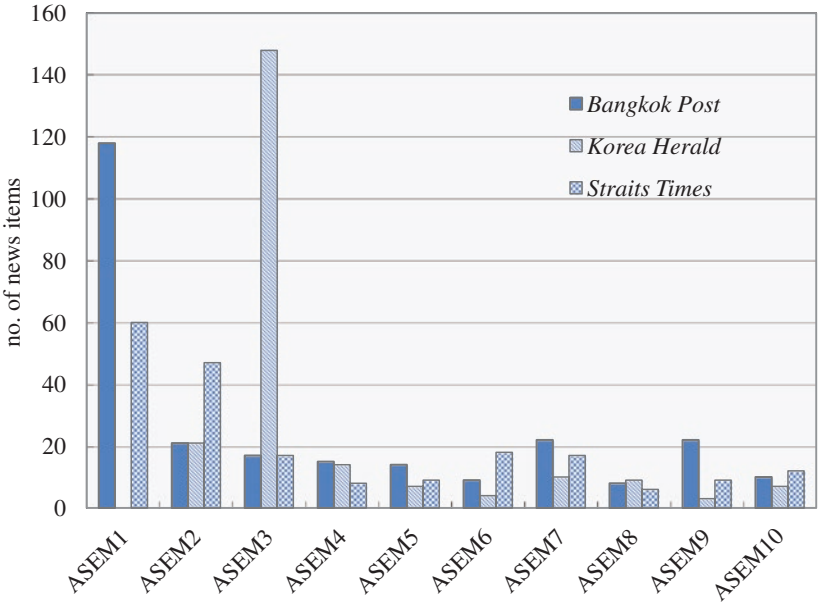

Fig. 2 Volume of news items mentioning ASEM in *Bangkok Post*, *Korea Herald* and *Strait Times*

Looking into details, among the 951 news items collected, only a third were devoted to covering ASEM itself (Fig. 1). News writers have been more interested in other events, namely the sideline meetings that took place among summit participants. Bilateral state-to-state meetings were the most numerous. In the collected news reportage of ASEM10, for instance, at least 16 bilateral meetings were noted on the margins. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang alone conducted bilateral meetings with four of his Asian counterparts and with leaders of the EU.

Apart from holding bilateral talks during the ASEM summit, a national leader's state visit during the same overseas trip has been another key media focus. For instance, *China Daily* covered in detail Chinese Premier Li's official visit to Italy, Germany, and Russia after attending ASEM10 in Milan. Similarly, *Korean Herald* wrote in detail about the then President Park Geun-hye's extended trip during ASEM10, which included a state visit to Italy as well as a meeting with Pope Francis at the Vatican.

Unsurprisingly, the reportage of ASEM in the eight monitored newspapers has been very much home-oriented, that is, the main issue is related directly to the home country. This explains the peak of ASEM-coverage in *Bangkok Post* during ASEM1, in *the Guardian* during ASEM2, in *Korean Herald* during ASEM3 and in *China Daily* during ASEM7. Also, ASEM-related news in each country usually records what the respective national leader says or does during ASEM summits or on the margins. Seemingly, journalists pay more attention to issues, which have a direct link to the home audience. Owing to such home-country focus, very few of the new ASEM members appeared in the monitored newspapers, all of which belonged to an ASEM founding country. In addition, it was found that the attendance of the Heads of State and Government to the respective summit helps to stir up media attention. In ASEM4, ASEM8, and ASEM10, Indonesia was represented at ministerial or lower level. At the same time the interest of *Jakarta Post* in these three summits was the lowest. Similarly, the number of news items on ASEM8 dropped significantly in Singapore, supposedly as a result of Prime Minister Lee's absence.

Apart from the relevance to the home country, media analysis from ASEM6 to ASEM10 shows that Asian media, especially those from Northeast Asia, were fascinated by the interaction between the Japanese leader and his counterparts from China and South Korea. More precisely, *China Daily*, *Japan Times* and *Korea Herald* are consistently interested in reporting the failure of the Japanese side to establish a bilateral meeting with China or Korea. In general, interest has been focusing on what happened on the sidelines of the summit while ASEM appears either as a background platform, as one of the legs of an overseas trip of a national leader, or as one of the meetings attended by a national leader.

Looking into the content centering on ASEM itself, that is, its substance or focus, ASEM is featured mainly as a forum for discussion between leaders from Asia and Europe on a wide variety of issues of common concern. The leading frame shifts according to the central dominant topic of the respective summit. For example, for ASEM2 in 1998, ASEM7 in 2008 and ASEM9 in 2012, the leading frame was economy as the reported discussion concentrated on the Asian Financial Crisis, the Global Financial Crisis, and the Eurozone debt crisis, respectively. In ASEM3 in 2000 and ASEM4 in 2002, the leading frame was politics as the reported discussion among ASEM leaders concentrated on inter-Korea relations (the then Korean President Kim Dae-jung won that

year's Nobel Peace Prize for his rapprochement toward North Korea), and counter-terrorism after the 9/11 events, respectively. From the audience's perspective, ASEM is another high-level fora like the G20 or East Asia Summit where leaders discuss international issues, but it is unlike the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) or the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), which focus on a particular policy field.

Furthermore, ASEM's media coverage is mostly factual reporting with very little negatively or positively toned commentary. 89% of the analyzed news items offered a neutral depiction of ASEM or a particular summit. 8% of the news reported ASEM with a positive tone, commending ASEM's importance in and contribution to the enhancement of relations between countries from Asia and Europe, as well as for individual countries (especially smaller ones) to manage a number of bilateral relations on a single occasion, and to project their profile internationally. An encouraging finding is that the percentage of positive reportage of ASEM has grown since the three most recent summits. One possible explanation is that this is the impact of the series of visibility-promotion projects of ASEM launched since 2009. Similarly, negative reportage of ASEM, which has been indeed relatively limited (3% in total), also decreased since ASEM8 in 2010. These critiques of ASEM focused on the lack of concrete deliverables, or in other words, on ASEM being a talk-shop.

The statistics used in this research were generated from the press coverage in eight ASEM member countries, while the membership of ASEM enlarged from 26 in ASEM1 to 53 in ASEM10. The author is aware that this has generated snapshots. An addition of 98 news items from the *Asia in the Eyes of Europe* served as a control to further verify the findings. In the 5-week long search period centered on ASEM8, the 24 monitored European news outlets only contained 98 ASEM-related news items. Noteworthy, 66 pieces of news were from the six Belgian outlets, as ASEM8 was held in Brussels. Not only was the visibility of ASEM8 low in the eight EU countries, 57% of the news items featured ASEM only in a minor sense in one or two sentences. For example, in the report of the death of former President Traian Basescu's mother, Romanian dailies mentioned ASEM8 in passing as Basescu was attending it while his mother passed away. The Belgian reportage focused on the temporary changes such as roadblocks due to the preparation of ASEM8 in Brussels. On the contrary, 23% of the news devoted full attention to ASEM8. In terms of tone, 95% of the coverage of ASEM carried

a neutral tone. The European media seemed to be more critical of ASEM than the Asian media. Negative evaluations of ASEM (4%) outnumbered the positive ones (1%).

These snapshots inform us about a number of important trends in ASEM's media visibility. First, while media attention on ASEM concentrates around the summit period, there has been a visible decline in absolute volume. This is not all bad news to ASEM, however, as the decrease is situated in the volume of coverage in which ASEM was mentioned as a minor actor. In fact, the centrality and evaluation of ASEM-news has improved since 2009. This research argues that the news articles focusing on the ASEM process itself are the ones that truly matter. In other words, in its profile-promotion, ASEM should continue to boost the amount of high-quality reports instead of blindly seeking quantity.

The second main finding is that media always look for two things: relevance and controversy. Regarding relevance, ASEM is reported more when it is seen as relevant to the local audience. Such relevance increases when an ASEM event is held in the respective country, or at least the respective region, or when the respective national leader plays an active role in a particular ASEM event. This can be explained from a news production perspective, as the newspaper could more easily "sell" news stories with their respective state as a main actor to local readers who are more familiar with national affairs than the international ones. Besides, media interest is proportional to the importance given to ASEM by the respective country. For instance, in Singapore, as initiator of the process and host of the Asia-Europe Foundation, and in Thailand and South Korea—hosts of the first and third summits, respectively, and key supporters of the process—media attention on ASEM has been consistently higher than in other countries. Although China and Japan have also been key supporters of ASEM, they also focus on other international fora in which they are involved, thereby diluting the attention given to ASEM.

Controversy is inherent to media practice. Issues such as the Japanese prime minister failing to secure a bilateral meeting with his Chinese or Korean counterparts, and Thai and Cambodian prime ministers seeking to confer on bilateral border disputes on the margins of the ASEM summit are more interesting for the media. On the contrary, ASEM's function as a platform or forum for countries in Asia and Europe to peacefully exchange opinions and views on hot issues are usually conflict-free, which is rather unexciting for news outlets especially given the fact that these discussions do not result in tangible cooperation.

In the aforementioned context, ASEM's low visibility is not surprising. Instead of blindly seeking higher visibility, ASEM governments should focus on strengthening the visibility of Asia in Europe and vice versa. Boosting interregional awareness and understanding is the ultimate mission of ASEM. If an increase in the visibility of ASEM is meant to help promote Asia-Europe interregional awareness, future efforts can be better targeted toward interregional awareness. In particular, the following section demonstrates that ASEM has not achieved much in this aspect thus far.

5 Public Involvement in ASEM

In terms of institutionalization, although its partners insist on calling it informal, ASEM during its first 2 decades has grown into a process with regular biennial summits, ministers', and senior officials' meetings. At the Track Two level, a physical institution (the Asia-Europe Foundation) was established and biennial gatherings of senior businesspeople (Asia-Europe Business Forum), of civil society (Asia-Europe People's Forum) and of parliamentarians (Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership) take place. In ASEM's Track Two in particular, various groups of non-state actors are found, including business community, academia, art professionals, trade unionists, social movement organizations, media professionals, and youth. The general public, although consistently mentioned in the official discourse, has only been involved in the ASEM process to a limited extent. While ASEM now comprises 60% of the world's total population, this section explores the findings of two transnational research projects to demonstrate that a large majority of ASEM countries' public is still left out of the process. It is crucial to study the public awareness of ASEM because its official discourses have repeatedly emphasized the general public as a key component in interregional interaction.

Three rounds of public opinion surveys conducted in seven ASEM Asian locations in 2008, 2010, and 2012, respectively, posed the question "Are you aware of the ASEM Process?" to randomly selected members of the general public in Asia. In total, the data set included 9448 completed surveys.[11]

An average of 68% of the public in the surveyed Asian countries remains unaware of the ASEM process after its existence for more than a decade. Remarkably, 95% of respondents in the Philippines,

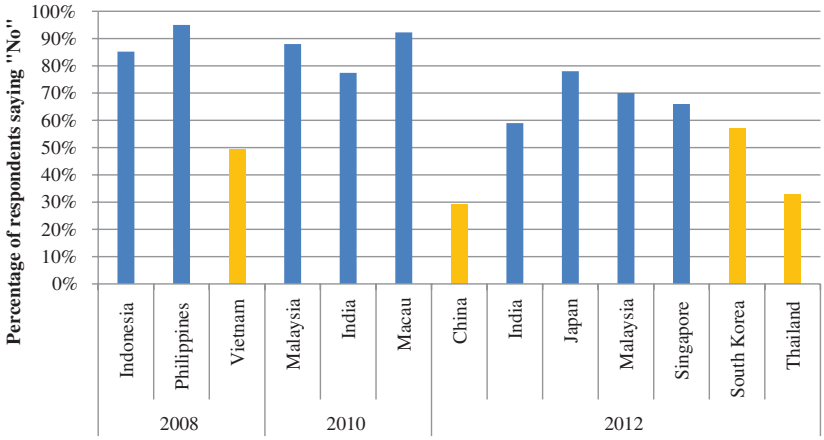

Fig. 3 Percentage of Asian respondents who were not aware of the ASEM process ($n = 9448$)

92% in Macau (China), 88% in Malaysia in 2010, 85% in Indonesia, 78% in Japan, 77% in India in 2010, 70% in Malaysia in 2012, 66% in Singapore, and 59% in India in 2012 were found to be unaware of ASEM (Fig. 3). However, in the countries that have hosted past ASEM summits (Thailand in 1996, South Korea in 2000, Vietnam in 2004, and China in 2008), the awareness of ASEM among the general public was higher; 67% of Thai respondents, 43% of Korean respondents, 50% of Vietnamese respondents and 70% of Chinese respondents said that they were aware of ASEM. In the two cases in which longitudinal comparison is feasible, namely Malaysia and India, the awareness of ASEM in both increased by 18% between 2010 and 2012. More data have to be obtained, in terms of both years and number of locations, in order to prove whether there is a universal rise in public awareness on ASEM, as well as to identify the possible reasons for such an increase.

On the European side, a public opinion survey was conducted between June and August 2010, briefly before the ASEM8 summit in Brussels, in eight EU member states. In total, the data set profiled 6115 completed interviews, while the sample sizes varied from country to country to reflect the population composition of the EU. The public opinion survey of *Asia in the eyes of Europe* asked respondents the question "How familiar are you with ASEM?". In average, more than

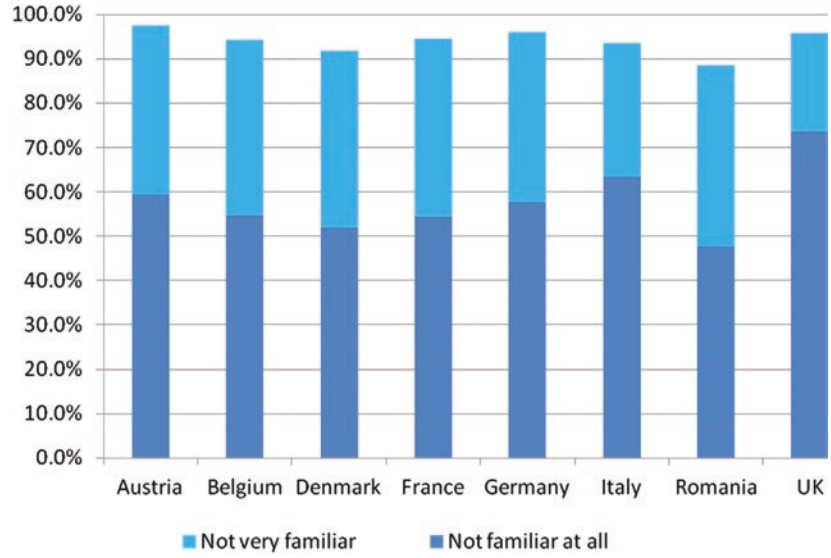

Fig. 4 Percentage of European respondents who were not familiar with the ASEM process

90% of the respondents from the eight ASEM European countries were either "not very familiar" or "not familiar at all" with the ASEM process (Fig. 4). An average of 58% of the interviewed European public stated that they are "not familiar at all" with ASEM. Despite its existence for one-and-a-half decades, ASEM remains distant from its European public.

It is noteworthy that the questions posed in the three aforementioned researches were all different. Hence, the findings are not directly comparable. Still, the results from these public surveys all point to the same direction, illustrating that the general public has been disconnected from the ASEM process thus far. Although "enhancement of mutual understanding and awareness between the people from Asia and Europe" has been one key objective in ASEM official discourses, a majority of the interviewed public did not know the ASEM process which was created more than a decade before the time the survey was conducted.

Regarding interregional connections, findings from *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific* project as well as *Asia in the eyes of Europe* project indicated the weak influence of the ASEM process on bridging people

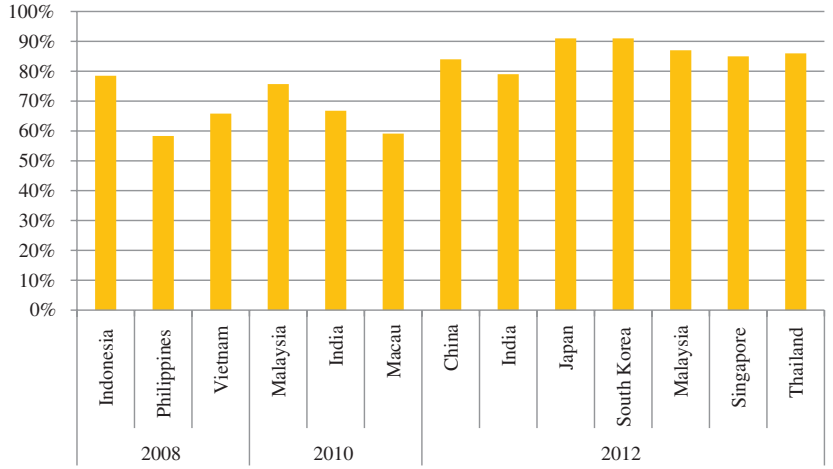

Fig. 5 Percentage of Asian respondents who had no personal or professional tie with any EU member state

from the two regions (Figs. 5, 6). In the two projects, public survey respondents were shown a list of ASEM European/ASEM Asian countries and asked to indicate which countries they had (personal or professional) ties with, and what kind of connection it concerned.[12]

After almost two decades into ASEM's and ASEF's existence, interregional linkages at the general public level are far from strong. In the Asian locations monitored, an average of 78% of Asian respondents did not have any personal/professional ties with any of the EU countries (Fig. 5). In the eight EU countries, the average was equally high. 77% of the European respondents did not have personal/professional connection with any ASEM Asian countries. The results in Malaysia and India were also compared across time. It is noteworthy that the number of Malaysian and Indian respondents who responded to having ties with EU countries dropped by 11 and 12%, respectively. All things considered, the huge "lack of connections" between the public in Asia and Europe revealed that ASEM and ASEF face a great challenge in improving interregional relations at the public level.

Comparing these results to the degree of awareness of ASEM among the Asian elites collected in *the EU in the eyes of Asia-Pacific*, it can be said that ASEM has been more visible among the elites than among

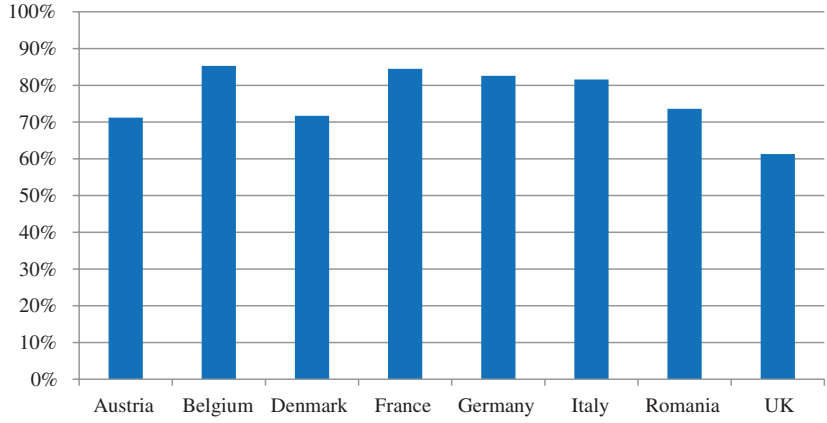

Fig. 6 Percentage of European respondents who had no personal or professional tie with any ASEM Asian member state

the general public. In addition, when the elites were asked to list their professional and personal ties with the EU and Europe, as illustrated in Fig. 7, very few interviewees said that they did not have any links with the EU and/or Europe. Compared with Fig. 5, the elites were much better connected, both professionally and personally, to Europe than the general public.

The above empirical findings show that the awareness of ASEM among the general public is worrying. The interviewed members of the public paid little attention to the process. Among various Track Two initiatives, ASEF is mandated to improve mutual awareness and understanding between the people in Asia and Europe. Compared to ASEM's huge population, the 20,000 individuals (ASEM InfoBoard) involved in the ASEF activities thus far constitute indeed a tiny proportion. While the biennial summit and no less than five regular, institutionalized ministerial meetings[13] are held, public engagement with the process has lacked regularity or capacity. Furthermore, little public information of the ASEM activities can be found, nor the general public is informed on how to be involved more in ASEM.

Contrary to the claim in the official discourse, the public does not appear to be the central part of the ASEM process. Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) and ASEF activities seem to trickle down insufficiently

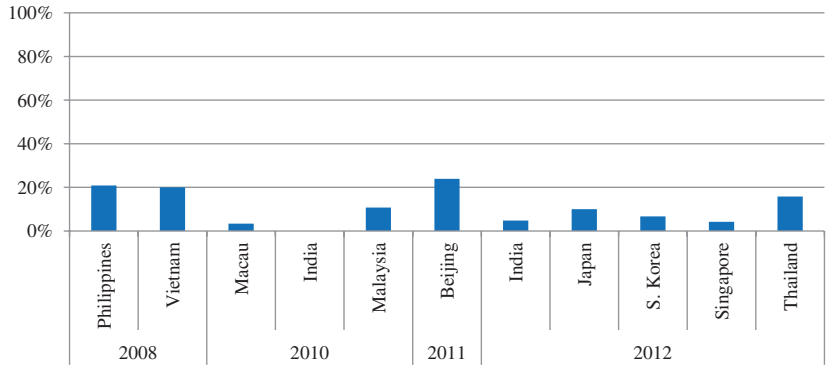

Fig. 7 Percentage of Asian elites who had no personal or professional tie with any EU member states

to the general public in Asia and Europe. In comparision with the general public, the national elites are more involved in the ASEM process. However, engagment is still limited to a small number of national elites.

6 Conclusions

Although the Asia-Europe Meeting has encompassed a Track Two to involve non-state actors, it has not substantially promoted its engagement with or awareness among the general public. In its institutional design, the inclusion of members from civil society has been a controlled and limited one. Among the various kinds of non-state actors, the engagement with the business community has been more valued by ASEM governments. On the contrary, civil society organizations and trade unionists were much less valued. They were compelled to create the Asia-Europe People's Forum and ASEM Trade Union Forum after feeling left behind by the official ASEM process. Moreover, these two for a were not listed as part of ASEM Forums in the ASEM InfoBoard until the official website's renovation in 2015. The direct involvement of the general public has been even less given the current institutional design of ASEM. Without direct engagement with its general public, any regular controversy or any concrete policy implications, it is unsurprising to see that the majority of the general public is not aware of the existence of ASEM.

Thus far, ASEM's main work has largely concerned and involved the elites, in both official and unofficial tracks. Even included, the parts from civil society which gain access to ASEM have been mostly the elites: senior business executives in the Asia-Europe Business Forum, academics and university students, think tanks, senior media professionals in ASEF's activities and exchange programs, law-makers in the Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership Meeting, and leaders of NGOs in the Asia-Europe People's Forum. Improvement of the awareness and understanding of "Asia" among the European publics and of "Europe" among the Asian public is still a main task. This remains one of ASEM's central tasks ahead, as it is the only forum in the world with such a mission.

Rather unexpectedly, by bringing together "Asia" and "Europe," ASEM is found to be more helpful in the socialization among participants intra-regionally instead of interregionally. As Gilson (1999, 2002, and 2005) has argued, actors from the same regions are expected to become more coherent as a result of repetitive collective participation in interregional fora. Regional identities enhance when states from two distinct regions interact under an interregional approach as differences between "self" and "other" are sharpened. Accordingly, social constructivists see interregionalism as a tool to form or foster regional identity, especially for heterogeneous and newly formed regional groupings.

Moreover, this chapter argued that ASEM's institutional design has limited interaction between the constituent actors. Its nature as a platform for exchange of opinions and viewpoints is best suited to slowly promote interpersonal relationships among the participants. In terms of qualitative contributions, the heads of state/government, ministers, and senior officials from ASEM governments build up personal connections through regular meetings. Subsequently, these individuals foster cross-cultural communication and understanding. The same applies to the non-state actors gathered in Track Two activities. ASEF has endeavored to engage beyond elites, but with its existing capacity, it cannot reach far enough, given the enormous size of the population of the 51 ASEM countries combined.

Owing to its state-centric, non-binding nature, ASEM is a preferred medium for international engagement for its member governments. ASEM provides a channel for regular and ad hoc meetings between 51 nations be it in plenary sessions or, more poignantly, on the sidelines. Furthermore, it is economical given its low institutional cost. Based on the substantial findings discussed earlier, this section proposes several

recommendations at the junction of the second-decade anniversary of ASEM, for ASEM member governments to improve the process's outreach and mutual understanding between Asia and Europe in the coming decade.

In terms of visibility, ASEM governments need to avoid seeking visibility purely for visibility sake. In today's media and social media, sensational and bad news sell the best. ASEM does not achieve this kind of sensationalism. Instead, the root cause(s) for ASEM's inability to reach out to its public should be identified and tackled. The current situation is a result of the process's nature, including distance from the general public, and as a government-driven and summit-centered forum for discussion instead of decision-making. Given the present institutional design of ASEM, its events together with ASEF activities can only reach a rather limited portion of the billions of citizens in the 51 ASEM member countries. Therefore, instead of seeking high visibility, ASEM should focus its limited resources on improving the quality of its public profile.

Better quality here refers to a correct understanding of what ASEM is and a real interest in the process itself. The current media coverage of ASEM rarely focuses on what ASEM really is or actually does. The vast majority of the focus is drawn by side issues. One of ASEM's problems is that media and the general public cannot see the relevance of the process to them. To increase or at least to correctly communicate its relevance to the media and public is what ASEM should do. In this regard, the series of visibility-promotion initiatives by the European Commission conducted since 2009 has indeed helped. Similar programs should be considered.

ASEF alone, with its limited human and financial resources, is insufficient to reach billions of citizens. If member governments themselves do not consider ASEM important enough to invest more resources, they should not expect their public to actively pay attention to ASEM. As suggested by the FMM11, ASEM members should confirm the importance of ASEM by linking the ASEM InfoBoard as well as information and news of the process to their Foreign Ministry websites.

Increasing ASEM's relevance is difficult, especially when ASEM remains informal and makes no concrete decisions on policies directly impacting citizens. The media and public worldwide have devoted much attention to the Belt and Road Initiative of China and the refugee crisis in Europe because they are aware that these issues are influential and will affect them somehow. Besides, a majority of ASEM meetings and initiatives remain elitist. If ASEM members truly want to promote the public

profile of the process, they should devote concrete support for large-scale initiatives to reach a wide population, for example through an ASEM Football Cup, an ASEM Singing Contest, Movie Festival, or TV program, or by introducing ASEM into school textbooks of each country.

More importantly, this research calls on ASEM member governments not to boost their own visibility but to focus on the original objective—to promote ties and boost mutual awareness between Asia and Europe. Therefore, the process should aim to enhance awareness and understanding of Asia in Europe and vice versa. Indeed, as a by-product, ASEM has already helped improve awareness and understanding among countries in the same region, that is, among Asian countries in Asia and among European countries in Europe.

In the coming decade, more efforts will be needed to promote inter-regional awareness and understanding, especially of and in smaller member countries lacking diplomatic resources. The FMM11 has already suggested introducing a "media exchange program" to annually fund one journalist from each ASEM country to travel to two other ASEM countries. The funded journalist, in return, should write a certain number of articles covering ASEM in the year following his/her tour.

Finally, this research suggests that a targeted outreach approach is needed. For this purpose, ASEM members can be divided into groups, such as those whose public are familiar with the other region and another with less knowledge and awareness. Other divisions can be between the founding partners of ASEM and the non-founding partners as well as between ASEM countries with larger populations and countries with smaller populations.

The empirical data discussed in the chapter reveal that the general public has not been at the core of the relationship building process in ASEM. Actions taken by ASEM members have not yet promoted a bottom-up approach or a mass involvement of the general public. The above findings and policy recommendations correspond to the critique of ASEM of being elitist.

Notes

1. FACTIVA is owned by Done Jones & Company. Established in 1999, it offers "a premier collection of the world's top media outlets, trade and consumer publications, and thousands of Web sites", according to www.dowjones.com/factiva/features.asp.
2. The research project was started by the National Centre for Research on Europe, University of Canterbury, New Zealand, in 2002. It identifies

the external image of the EU and the attitude and opinions on the ASEM process in Asia-Pacific. For more details, see www.euperceptions.canterbury.ac.nz/.

3. It is a younger project, started in mid-2010. The 2-year project is funded by the Asia-Europe Foundation in partnership with the German Council on Foreign Relations, National Centre for Research on Europe (University of Canterbury) and Tsinghua University. It examines European public, media, and opinion leaders' perceptions of Asia. See also www.asef.org/index.php/projects/themes/education/1148-asia-in-the-eyes-of-europe.
4. The sample size in 2008 and 2010 phases was set at 400 respondents, sustaining the margin of error at ±4.9% at a confidence level of 95%. The sample size for 2012 increased to 1000 respondents, sustaining the margin of error at ±3% with the same confidence level of 95%.
5. The margin of error ranged from ±3 to ±7% at a confidence level of 95%.
6. Each location included one reputable prestigious national broadsheet daily with high circulation, one popular national tabloid as well as one popular television prime-time news broadcast. The only exception was the French case in which no popular national tabloid is available; therefore, two prestigious broadsheets, *Le Figaro* and *Le Monde*, were monitored.
7. The other search terms are "Asia", "Asian", "Association of Southeast Asian Nations/ASEAN", "South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation/SAARC" and "Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation/APEC".
8. www.aseminfoboard.org.
9. The most recent ASEM11 summit in Mongolia endorsed the suggestions included in the Press and Public Awareness Strategy.
10. The enlargement of ASEM to embrace Myanmar was first discussed in ASEM4, while the UK had been strongly opposing the accession of the military junta government.
11. The sample size in 2008 and 2010 phases was 400 respondents, sustaining the margin of error at ±4.9% at a confidence level of 95%. The target sample size for the 2012 round increased to 1000 respondents in each country, sustaining the margin of error at ±3% with the same confidence level of 95%.
12. Indonesia data were not in application because the translation of related data is not available.
13. Thus far, Foreign, Finance, Culture, Education and Transport ministers convene regularly under the ASEM framework.

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CHAPTER 8

Reinventing ASEM: A Need for Relevance

Gauri Khandekar

1 Introduction

Launched in 1996, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) remains the sole platform dedicated exclusively to Asia-Europe relations. A total of 51 European and Asian nations, the European Union (EU) and the ASEAN Secretariat meet within its ambit to discuss the future of intercontinental relations and global affairs. In two decades of existence, the forum has brought together leaders from both sides, in addition to providing a continuous dialogue mechanism for officials, experts and civil society on foreign affairs, economic, financial, environmental, cultural and educational issues.

Today, Asia and Europe are arguably more divided than ever before. In Europe, the EU faces crises of existential magnitude with support for regional integration largely dwindling. Brexit or the possible British exit from the EU following a public referendum in June 2016 in favor of the same has left not only markets in turmoil but also global leaders in panic about the future of the EU. The continued Greek debt and migration crises are further tipping over the precariously balanced political equation in Europe. In Asia, tensions have risen significantly between

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various countries. Nuclear-armed India and Pakistan came close to war in 2016 over the disputed region of Kashmir, as the Comprehensive Bilateral Dialogue (CBD) process between both nations remains stalled. In East Asia, relations between China and Japan remain ominous. China and Japan both dispute territory in the East China Sea and routinely face each other off over its contested waters. The Korean peninsula too remains on edge as an increasingly nervous North Korea rattles its saber. On 12 July, The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration ruled against China in a case brought to it by The Philippines on the South China Sea dispute, effectively quashing China's "historical claims" based on the so-called nine-dash line to the South China Sea. Not only did China reject the Tribunal's ruling, but unsurprisingly, a number of Asian countries including India and members of the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) never supported the Philippines' move to take the dispute to the Permanent Court of Arbitration in the first place.

Moreover, the tide of nationalism in both Europe and Asia is rising. From the Philippine President Rodrigo Duterte to Taiwanese President Tsai-ing Wen in Asia; and a number of far right movements or notions gaining strength in various EU countries like France, Germany, UK, Austria, Italy, The Netherlands, Poland, Hungary, and so on, a nationalist surge will surely provide a formidable challenge to ASEM going forward.

The importance of ASEM as a connecting platform between Europe and Asia within a changing global order must increase given the economic interdependence and geopolitical challenges in both regions that underline a greater need for engagement. The election of Donald Trump as US President indicates a possibility that American involvement in the Asia-Pacific and its pledge for action against climate change may decrease, judging from Donald Trumps' unambiguous rhetoric, which further reinforces the rationale for Europe to strengthen its role in Asia for which ASEM can be an important medium.

ASEM continues to be perceived as a mere talking shop that has generated few tangible outputs (Fukushima 2014). As a result, the forum has struggled to garner visibility and justify its existence. To rectify this, an internal process of "reinventing" ASEM has been set in motion with the 2006 Summit in Helsinki suggesting the creation of a number of issue/interest-based groups of member countries to lead projects that could eventually involve others. At the Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Delhi in November 2013, 12 thematic areas were outlined under which

such "coalitions of the willing" could work (European External Action Service 2013). These thematic areas were further expanded to 20 at ASEM's 20th-anniversary summit held in Mongolia in 2016. Yet such an orientation threatens to further loosen an already disbanded association. It remains unclear as to how this process would feed into strengthening the forum or generate visible tangibles.

ASEM could instead do with two signature initiatives in areas of broadly shared interest that could involve all members and deliver concrete high-utility outputs with a focus on connectivity and sustainability. An ASEM center on urbanization and a center on human security and climate action could add much-needed relevance to a forum struggling to compete in a surfeit of regional fora.

2 ASEM—A Viable Forum

ASEM sits atop a very elaborate structure of bilateral relations between the European Union as well as EU member state with individual Asian countries. ASEM therefore seeks to coalesce an intense yet independent set of bilateral relations into a thriving intercontinental relationship and harness the potential of Asia-Europe collaboration as a whole. Conceived by Singapore and France, ASEM was created with the simple ambition of bringing Asia and Europe together at all levels to foster greater cooperation on regional issues and multilateral policies, promote trade and investment, and encourage civil society interaction.

In 20 years of its existence, ASEM has achieved much under its three-pillar structure: political, economic and cultural. Arguably most of the (tangible) progress has been achieved under the third pillar in socio-cultural and educational exchanges, and people-to-people contacts (see Chap. 4). Education has seen the most progress with two programs, namely the *ASEM Education Hubs* and *ASEM Duo* providing thousands of scholarships for intercontinental educational exchanges (ASEM Infoboard). The Trans-Eurasian Information Network (TEIN) further creates a direct link between European and Asian research and education networks (ASEM Infoboard). The Asia-Europe People's Forum (AEPF) brings together civil society representatives from both sides alongside official ASEM summits. Under the political pillar, geopolitical and multilateral issues are discussed and include dialogue on security cooperation (weapons of mass destruction and non-proliferation, arms control, counter-terrorism, anti-piracy, cybercrime, and human trafficking). ASEM

has established an ad hoc informal consultative mechanism held before United Nations (UN) General Assembly sessions at the appropriate level in New York to help coordinate positions. Other initiatives include an ASEM anti-money laundering project, an ASEM Ministerial Conference on Cooperation for the Management of Migratory Flows held in Spain in April 2002, an Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) which brings together parliaments from both sides, and more than 12 informal ASEM Seminars on Human Rights (ASEM Infoboard).

Similarly, the economic pillar has been an important mechanism with much potential in fostering dialogue on globalization, international financial architecture, WTO issues, trade facilitation and economic liberalization, investment issues, information and communication technology, and sustainable development (ASEM Infoboard). The Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) and the Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) are consultative mechanisms directed toward the reduction and removal of non-tariff barriers to trade between the two continents, as well as investment promotion. ASEM's most timely and visible initiatives in this sphere have been the ASEM Trust Fund and the European Financial Expertise Network (EFEX) launched in response to the Asian economic crisis of 1997 to deliver technical advice and training in both financial reform and social sectors to Asian economies affected by the crisis. Moreover, the Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF), an annual meeting of business leaders, was created to streamline views of business communities from both sides into ASEM's official processes (Asia-Europe Business Forum, ASEM Infoboard). An ASEM SMEs Eco-Innovation Center (ASEIC) was established in February 2011 to promote eco-innovation in small and medium enterprises (SMEs) given that SMEs form the backbone of Europe's and Asia's economies (European SMEs form more than 98 per cent of all enterprises in Europe employing 67% of total employed while Asian SMEs constitute around 90% of all Asian businesses employing around 60% of the work force) (Khandekar 2013).

The level of interaction within the forum is high, with ministers, senior officials and experts, parliamentarians as well as business representatives and civil society groups meeting in between the biennial summit that brings together leaders from both sides. ASEM has been particularly important for the spate of bilateral meetings that take place between leaders during summits. The Delhi Foreign Minister's Meeting in November 2013 registered more than 100 bilateral meetings! These

bilateral meetings have at times served as crucial icebreakers for countries such as India and Pakistan when normal dialogue is suspended.

3 Challenges and Re-Orientation

Despite ASEM's many important yet low-profile initiatives and its role as a networking club, the forum has struggled to gain visibility especially faced with other purpose-oriented international fora like the G20, Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), or ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Unlike APEC which was created with the specific purpose of promoting free trade and economic cooperation in the Asia Pacific, the G20 to debate the international financial system, or the ARF for regional security, cooperation under ASEM is spread thin over a notoriously large number of fields. ASEM also falls short of high-profile objectives like APEC's, which aims to create a free trade area of the Asia-Pacific (FTAAP). ASEM has yet to debate the possibility of an EU-Asia plurilateral FTA despite a number of FTAs (completed or under negotiation) between the EU and its Asian ASEM members. The lack of definition of purpose as well as the absence of high-profile goals translates into a poor drive.

Furthermore, ASEM lacks the agility of smaller fora like the G20 or the ARF. At 53 members, ASEM is a bulky grouping, dubbed a mini-UN. The stark absence of a vision for ASEM as a forum means that the agenda keeps changing at the expense of continuity and topical international issues take priority. And even there, leaders must tiptoe around prickly issues such as the South China Sea dispute, Indo-Pak tensions, and the Ukraine crisis, for fear of upsetting members. Moreover, the possibility for spontaneous dialogue is capped with leaders (those who attend) tending to read through scripted speeches ensuring all that's meant to be said is said, without really stimulating discussion. With its many levels of interaction, ASEM may not fall short on momentum, but it does lack excitement. The main challenge ASEM faces is orienting itself to become more relevant to partners' economic and social priorities all while involving its entire membership.

The association has long recognized the need for reinventing itself by streamlining its modus operandi and gaining more visibility among the public. Indeed at the Summit in Helsinki in 2006, the remedy sought was to make leadership more issue-based with certain members taking the lead in projects/initiatives in which they have an interest and

expertise (ASEM6). Such projects would be open to other members willing to participate eventually. The Delhi Foreign Ministers' Meeting in November 2013 even announced a collated list of interested ASEM members for tangible cooperation in 12 areas [without outlining specific projects (European External Action Service 2013)]. The list covers a broad array of areas: disaster management and mitigation, water management, SME cooperation, renewable energy, energy efficiency, higher education, vocational training, food safety issues, human resource development, waste management, trade and investment, and poverty reduction (European External Action Service 2013).For instance, Greece, Hungary, Malaysia, Myanmar, India, and Pakistan are in the group on Education and Human Resources Development. At the 11th ASEM summit commemorating 20 years of ASEM, the following 8 new areas were added to the list (European External Action Service 2016): Promotion and protection of human rights, Information Technology/ Knowledge Connectivity, Transport and Logistics, Technologies for Diagnostics, Promotion of Tourism, Women's Empowerment, Nuclear Safety, and Youth Cooperation.

However, a number of European countries like Germany, France, Sweden, Finland, Croatia, or Italy are not in any of the groups. Some groups even consist of only Asian members. Furthermore, the danger is that such an approach involving smaller groups might not only fracture an already lose organization, but also preclude multilateralism. It is furthermore doubtful how such an orientation would ensure more visibility for ASEM, arguably making it harder for promoting multiple ASEM initiatives to the public. This process would necessitate greater communication to relevant audiences, which is difficult for ASEM in the absence of a permanent secretariat. What is more, the issues outlined are those on which the EU or its member states already cooperate with their Asian peers wherein the added value of ASEM is lost.

It would be worthwhile to consider instead two key signature initiatives which could deliver tangible results and are guaranteed to generate visibility: an ASEM Center on Urbanization and an ASEM Center on Human Security and Climate Action. Urbanization, human security and climate action are issues critical for Asia and Europe and those in which arguably both regions have shared interests. While urbanization would open up cooperation between the EU and other Asian countries (the EU currently has an urbanization partnership only with China), collaborating on the umbrella-issue of human security and climate action at

an intercontinental level would address a number of problems that have a direct impact on Asia, Europe, and the world. In addition, both these centers could strategically connect Europe and Asia in economic, social, health and political aspects.

4 An ASEM Center on Urbanization

By 2030, a tectonic shift is predicted to occur whereby Asia would overtake the West (defined as North America and Europe) in gross domestic product, population, military spending, as well as technological investment. According to Standard Chartered, by 2030, Asia (minus Japan) would represent around 40% of global Gross Domestic Product (GDP) (Standard Chartered 2014). Just China and India (world's first and third largest economies by 2030) would have doubled their share of global GDP by that date according to the European Report on Development 2013 (The European Centre for Development Policy Management 2013). According to the same report, by 2030, around 67% of the global middle-class will reside in the Asia-Pacific region, a jump from 500 million to 3.2 billion, with their real purchasing power rocketing from $5 billion to $32.6 billion eclipsing North America ($5.8 billion) and Europe [$11.3 billion (The European Centre for Development Policy Management 2013)]. According to IHS Global Insight, by 2030, ASEAN would have a $10 trillion economy, the global fifth, overtaking Japan (Pal Singh 2013). Just Indonesia is predicted, by the US National Intelligence Council's Global Trends Report 2012, to become the seventh largest global economy by 2030 overtaking Germany and the UK and become the fourth after China, India, and the USA in terms of consumption power (National Intelligence Council 2012). Myanmar, one of the least developed economies in the grouping, would become a $200 billion economy by 2030 according to the McKinsey Group International [MGI (Chhor et al. 2013)].

Yet, to meet these predictions, Asia has tremendous urbanization challenges in the short term. HSBC's Asian Economic Research estimates that $11.5 trillion (or approximately 80% of the region's current annual gross domestic product) will have to be invested in infrastructure until 2030 (Man 2013). In a humbling metaphor, according to an MGI study, "India would need to build a city the size of Chicago every year for the next 20 years in order to create enough commercial/residential space" (McKinsey Global Institute 2010). Urbanization is a pressing

need shared by the majority of Asian economies and is an equally serious concern for developed Asian economies that are dependent on the former. Prospects for Asia's growth up to 2030 represent much excitement and fear, but can also signify major opportunities for the EU to generate prosperity, growth, and jobs back home. McKinsey notes that Indonesia's path to modernization and urbanization alone "could create a $1.8 trillion private-sector business opportunity by 2030" (Oberman et al. 2012).

Western and other developed Asian actors like the USA, Canada, Japan, and Australia are working together with developing Asia on urbanization. While the EU is largely present in China's urban transformation scene, it is relatively absent from that of the rest of Asia's. The EU is the largest source of aid for Asia today. But EU aid is currently channeled toward areas that largely fall under the traditional aspects of development which includes economic, social, cultural, political, and environmental dimensions: poverty alleviation, provision of basic needs, access to essentials and social empowerment, and the protection and empowerment of vulnerable groups including children and women. Urbanization adds new aspects to development including modernization, infrastructure, business, jobs, and empowerment as important interdependent factors for a development toward modern social cities.

The EU as a socially-harmonized industrialized group that has developed unparalleled connectivity could be best placed to assist Asia as a whole (not just China) in its urbanization trajectory. While Asia has embarked on its journey towards urbanization, it is essential to ensure that the path to urbanization is both sustainable and green. The EU has extensive experience in building sustainable, socially inclusive societies. Advancing bilateral cooperation on sustainable urbanization would not only enable both regions to make an important contribution to a significant percentage of the world's population but also pave the way for enhanced and deeper dialogue at multilateral echelons, including on the UN's 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (Khandekar 2016). Creating a continental-level platform of an ASEM Center on Urbanization where European experts and companies could interact with the multitude of Asian stakeholders would help facilitate investment in Asia's infrastructure construction sectors or in sustainable green growth. Such a center, built in Asia, could directly facilitate dialogue and cooperation on energy, transport, city planning, infrastructure, and exchange

of IT-based technologies. ASEM's 11th summit was held under the theme of "partnership for the future through connectivity" where leaders agreed to enhance connectivity in all dimensions, aware that such efforts would contribute to the relevance of ASEM. ASEM members have also "underlined the need to ensure, where appropriate, wider engagement of the civil society and various stakeholders, inter alia, business, labor partners, scholars and think-tanks, women's organizations, students and youth as well as journalists, in the ASEM process, and to enhance ASEM visibility and its continued relevance for the people" (European External Action Service 2016). Working on a strictly bilateral basis would not achieve the aim. As a grouping, it is essential for ASEM to have a visible platform through which it can work to achieve connectivity. An ASEM center on urbanization would not only be a major win-win for both continents generating much visibility for and vigor into ASEM and Asia-Europe relations, but would also contribute to global sustainable growth and development.

5 An ASEM Center on Human Security and Climate Action

In a similar manner, an ASEM Center on Human Security and Climate Action established in Asia can provide an effective foundation to develop Europe-Asia collaboration in a holistic yet focused manner on a number of serious interlinked issues.

According to the 1994 Human Development Report by the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), human security refers to "safety from such chronic threats as hunger, disease, and repression" and "protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life – whether in homes, in jobs or in communities" (United Nations Development Program 2014). The 1994 UNDP report identifies seven dimensions of human security—economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (United Nations Development Program 2014). The concept of human security enjoins freedom from fear and freedom from want, and is people-centered—which involves not only the State but also individuals and communities as actors concerned with, and responding to, threats to human welfare and wellbeing. As such human security has important implications for international

development and underlines the interdependencies between human rights and development.

However, human security is a much-contested topic. Currently, there are two broad schools of thought. The first sees human security as an all-encompassing formula, including human development, human rights, human freedom, human dignity, and security. This is a view supported by the Japanese government and a number of other Asian countries. This broad approach reflects the efforts of the so-called global South to put development concerns, non-military threats to security and issues of equity on the international security agenda, not least through the initiatives of groups like NAM and the G77.

The second, narrower understanding of human security limits itself to freedom from fear, conceptualizing human security as freedom from organized violence, repression, and human rights abuses. It focuses on the principle of "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) under which states are responsible for protecting their people from four mass atrocities—genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing and should states be unwilling or unable to provide such protection, the international community would help and would be entitled, as a last resort, to intervene to protect civilians. The most popular proponents of this definition have been Canada and Norway, but also the EU. In 2004, the then European Union (EU) High Representative for Common Foreign and Security Policy Javier Solana commissioned a report to assess European security capabilities and develop proposals toward the implementation of the 2003 European Security Strategy (ESS) itself. The report, entitled "A Human Security Doctrine for Europe" (known as the Barcelona Report), advocated a human security doctrine for European foreign and security policy and focused on freedom from fear (while also mentioning violations to the rights to food, health and housing). To achieve its operational objectives, the report recommended the creation of a Human Security Response Force, composed of 15,000 men and women (military and at least one-third civilians), and backed by a legal framework for intervention and directing operations on the ground (Kaldor et al. 2004).[1]

The two understandings of human security—broad and narrow—have been divided along North–South lines within the UN. Western countries, such as Canada and EU member states, have mostly embraced the freedom from fear agenda, while developing countries have rallied behind the freedom from want agenda, also backed by Japan. For the

global South, the narrow conceptualization is wedded to the R2P idea. Developing countries fear that human security may be instrumentalized to legitimize interventions, invite interference and compromise sovereignty. However, it would be politically feasible and socially acceptable for Europe and Asia to collaborate on four of the 1994 UNDP report's seven dimensions of human security—economic security, food security, health security, and environmental security (Kaldor et al. 2004), while eschewing the freedom from fear agenda.

In the above-mentioned four areas, Asia, which is emerging as the new geostrategic epicenter of international politics, fares poorly, and is confronted by a number of challenges. According to the Asian Development Bank (ADB) 2014 report, 1.6 billion people in the Asia-Pacific live on less than two US dollars a day—the vast majority of the world's poor (Asian Development Bank 2014). Two-thirds of the world's 842 million undernourished people live in the Asia-Pacific, according to Food and Agriculture Organization [FAO (Food and Agricultural Organization of the United Nations 2010)]. The ADB states that Asia still houses 67% or over 550 million of the world's hungry (Asian Development Bank 2013). Agricultural productivity needs to be revitalized in Asia all while sustaining the poor subsistence farmer (350 million Asia farmers are subsistence farmers), and maintaining food prices (Asian Development Bank 2013). In terms of health security, Asia's challenges are abundant ranging from malnutrition, diseases, water and sanitation, maternal and child health, pandemics, paucity of good quality healthcare systems, poor access to treatment and essential medicines, poor immunization, mortality or morbidity.

In issues pertaining to human security, there is much merit for Europe and Asia to work together to address common challenges and build on the vast body of development work they have engaged in over decades. Asia's human security challenges have an impact on Europe in an increasingly interconnected world where crises cannot be contained by borders. Europe has had much demonstrable success in building resilient, inclusive, and sustainable societies. Asian countries can acquire knowledge, know-how and expertise, technological input, and targeted cooperation in these issues from Europe. Moreover, greater collaboration on human security would also ameliorate the interregional partnership at the multilateral level.

Connected closely to the wide spectrum of challenges that human security represents is climate change. Climate change today is arguably

the biggest existential hazard for Asia, the world's most populous region that finds itself in the midst of concentrated development activity. The United Nations Environment Program (UNEP) reckons the Asia-Pacific region to be one of the most vulnerable regions to climate change. Intense industrialization in Asia is leading to rising levels of temperature, pollution, dangerous greenhouse gas emissions, retreat of glaciers, and permafrost at an unprecedented rate, making climate change an urgent concern. Air pollution according to the World Health Organization (WHO), causes more than 2 million people worldwide die every year, is one of the main causes of premature deaths in the world and causes millions of others to suffer from illnesses. According to the WHO global study, 65% of all air pollution deaths occur in Asia.

The impact of climate change is palpable across the region and is estimated to continue intensifying, including as regards climate hazards. China, the Philippines, India, and Indonesia list among the top 5 countries in the world most frequently hit by natural disasters (Sapir et al. 2013). In 2012, the continent was struck by 40.7% of the world's natural disasters but accounted for 64.5% of global disaster victims (Sapir et al. 2013). The economic cost of these hazards too is extremely high. According to the ADB's Asian Economic Integration Monitor report, Asia has borne financial costs of nearly US$53 billion annually over the last two decades (Asian Development Bank 2014). Not only does this present a clear threat to livelihoods but also threatens economic growth. Vinod Thomas, the director general at the ADB believes that "what we are looking at is not an interruption to economic growth and development but a systematic threat that could potentially derail economic development in the region."

Yet, economic growth and jobs are a priority. Energy consumption and subsequent greenhouse gases emissions remain high and expected to grow significantly in the future across Asia. According to UNEP, the Asia-Pacific accounts for nearly half of global greenhouse gas emissions. Fossil fuels will continue to be the energy of choice and anything interfering with growth is seen as antinational and against poverty reduction. Yet, in April 2016, 195 countries including all ASEM members signed the Paris Agreement committing themselves to climate action, which includes reducing greenhouse gases emissions mitigation, adaptation and climate finance and transition to renewable energies. The Paris agreement entered into force on 4 November 2016 and must form an essential part of ASEM's next decade for members to work together toward

the timely and full implementation of the Paris agreement goals. A dedicated center on climate action would be a solid forum for transfer of clean technologies, exchange of best practices for climate resilient development, to foster clean and renewable energy, to formulate long-term low greenhouse gas emission development strategies, to jointly address the adverse impacts of climate change, facilitate climate mitigation finance transfer, and support capacity-building for adaptation, loss and damage measures. Currently, for instance, disaster response in the region remains scattered and uncoordinated with each country sending aid unilaterally in the aftermath of a disaster.

A well-equipped ASEM Center on Human Security and Climate Action in the Asian region could be designed to become a crucial meeting point for European and Asian stakeholders given that the concept of human security and climate action are people-centered and interlinked. A study by the World Resource Institute found that there is significant alignment between the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Paris agreement and that implementing them together has the potential to generate significant mutual benefits (Northrop et al. 2016). It would also, like the center on urbanization, provide much visibility to ASEM. It could furthermore become an effective base for expanding cooperation between the EU and Asia in developing targeted among other measures early-warning systems, coordinated disaster risk reduction mechanisms, food banks, mainstreaming disaster risk reduction, transfer of clean energy technologies, building capacities for renewable energies, and reducing greenhouse gas emissions into national development strategies.

6 Conclusion

In the process of reorienting ASEM leaders must ensure that the organization does not spread itself too thin over a multitude of areas. In the absence of a permanent secretariat, this challenge is redoubled when it comes to gaining visibility for ASEM's many initiatives. ASEM's current future direction of working on numerous thematic areas under a "coalition-of-the-willing" formula threatens to fragment cooperation and loosen an already disbanded association. It is moreover unclear how collaboration under these thematic areas would generate tangible outcomes with ASEM-wide visibility. Concentrating on a few high-utility initiatives without losing the intense dialogue mechanisms of ASEM would be

useful. A Center on Urbanization and a Center on Human Security and Climate Action are two options that the forum could explore to enhance intercontinental cooperation and generate significant visibility. These centers would also help to limit strategic priorities to those where ASEM can make a real difference to the global human security, sustainability, and climate agenda.

Note

1. For a broader analysis of the human security debate in Europe, see Christou (2014).

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CHAPTER 9

ASEM'S Process of Enlargement and Its Implications

Bart Gaens

1 Introduction

The enlargement or "widening" of an organization can be defined as "a process of gradual and formal horizontal institutionalization of organizational rules and norms," occurring "when institutions spread beyond the incumbent actors, that is, when the group of actors whose actions and relations are governed by the organization's norms becomes larger" (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2002, p. 503). If one were to take the expansion in membership of a club as a yardstick of success, achievement and global relevance, then ASEM's performance is beyond doubt. In the span of 20 years, the partnership has more than doubled in size, widening from 26 to 53 members. ASEM has been and remains open "to interested countries of Asia and Europe" (ASEM 2016). However, it is

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clear that an open expansion process has important implications for a forum such as ASEM.

Increased membership adds to ASEM's collective weight and, at least in theory, allows it to make a greater contribution to promoting multilateralism and shaping the international agenda. Certainly, for many policymakers involved in the process, the continuing applications for membership are a sign of success—they show that there is a demand for the role ASEM can play and the significance it can have. This is also the obvious official line. As noted by the FMM10 held in Hungary in (2011), "the success of the ASEM process is clearly seen from the fact of its popularity proven by the rapidly increasing number of its participants and the further interest expressed by other countries in joining ASEM" (ASEM 2011). Or, in the words of former European Commission President Romano Prodi, ASEM's gradual enlargement "is the strongest evidence of its success so far" (Prodi 2015).

However, for critical observers the "open" approach to enlargement has turned ASEM into an unwieldy and diffuse talk-shop. Criticizing the preference given to widening over deepening, they argue that membership expansion has only exacerbated the forum's inefficiencies and inertia, underscoring the perception of ASEM as a forum of decreasing importance (Camroux 2006, p. 31–32). Questions should therefore be raised as to how enlargement affects the interregional structure and the partnership's cohesion and coordination. This chapter focuses on the past process and current impact of ASEM's enlargement. It first looks at the different stages of enlargement the forum went through. It then critically examines the rules and guidelines, laid down in ASEM's guiding charter, underlying this process of growth. These guidelines are highly significant not only for obviously shaping the process of growth, but also because of the expectations and regional preconceptions they denote. The chapter then zooms in on consequences and challenges related to the enlargement process, in particular on how enlargement from 26 to 53 partners has impacted the nature and character of the forum in terms of its cooperative initiatives on the ground, and its coordination and practical management.

2 ASEM's Enlargement Process

Twenty-six participants attended the inaugural ASEM summit, held in Bangkok in March 1996. These included 15 EU member states[1] plus the European Commission, and seven-member ASEAN (Association of

Table 1 ASEM's expansion

Year	*Europe*	*Asia*	*Total*
1996	EU15, European Commission	ASEAN7, China, Japan, ROK	26
2004	EU25, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK	39
2008	EU27, European Commission	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, ASEAN Secretariat	45
2010	EU27, European Union	ASEAN10, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, ASEAN Secretariat, Australia, New Zealand, Russia	48
2012	EU27, European Union, Norway, Switzerland	ASEAN10, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Bangladesh	51
2014	EU28, European Union, Norway, Switzerland	ASEAN10, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, ROK, India, Pakistan, Mongolia, Australia, New Zealand, Russia, Bangladesh, Kazakhstan	53

Southeast Asian Nations)[2] in addition to China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea (ROK). Since then the forum has gone through five stages of enlargement, as summarized in Table 1.

After EU enlargement took place in (2004), the ten new EU member states[3] also joined ASEM. In the meantime ASEAN had expanded to include Myanmar and Laos in 1997, and Cambodia in 1999. To balance the expansion of the European grouping, they joined the Asian side in ASEM, making it a forum of 39. During a second round of enlargement, India, Mongolia, Pakistan, and the ASEAN Secretariat formally entered the partnership in 2008, after the EU had further come to include Bulgaria and Romania, bringing the total membership to 45. The ASEM8 summit in Brussels of 2010 confirmed the membership of Australia, New Zealand, and Russia. The total number of members went further up from 48 to 51 when Bangladesh, and non-EU states Norway and Switzerland were allowed into ASEM in 2012. On the occasion of the Milan summit in October 2014, Croatia joined on the European side after having become an EU member state, while the forum at the same time expanded into Central Asia with the joining of Kazakhstan. The tally at present thus stands at 53 partners, 31 European and 22 Asian ones. These comprise 2 institutions (the EU and the ASEAN

Secretariat), 28 EU member states, and 2 other European countries; as well as 10 Southeast Asian, 4 Northeast Asian, 3 South Asian, and 2 Australasian states, in addition to 1 Central Asian, and 1 Eurasian state. In 2016 ahead of the ASEM11 summit in Mongolia, Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine officially applied for membership, and multiple Asian countries, including Central Asian states, expressed their interest in joining. No decision was taken however, as for further widening of the partnership.

3 ASEM's Formal Enlargement Rules

According to the official rhetoric, ASEM membership is open, evolutionary, inclusive and conducted on the basis of consensus. As ASEM is first and foremost an intergovernmental forum, states are the prime actors. The process highlights the roles of national governments and emphasizes a state-to-state approach. ASEM offers its partners opportunities to meet with counterparts from Asia and Europe in a multilateral setting, allowing for bilateral meetings in the sidelines to promote national interests and even to launch collaborative initiatives in a certain area of expertise. In spite of this intergovernmental focus, ASEM's initial underlying philosophy for membership, as is obvious from its name, was rooted in a meeting between two regional groupings. The interregional dimension is still obvious in coordination and management of the process. In Europe in particular, ASEM functions are closely integrated into the regional set-up, namely the institutions and mechanisms of the EU. The EU regards ASEM is as a vital tool for its overall policy for Asia, and a key part of its interregional agenda. The Asian grouping has always been and certainly remains comparatively less integrated than the EU, but also among Asian ASEM countries coordination takes place on a regional basis.

ASEM's rules for joining the partnership equally reflect the region-to-region idea. The forum's enlargement policy is based on the Asia-Europe Cooperation Framework (AECF2000), ASEM's core charter. At the first summit in 1996, the partners agreed that the process should remain open and evolutionary, but no membership criteria or concrete plans for enlargement were identified. However, already in 1997 the Commission document "Perspectives and Priorities for the ASEM Process" refers to the "two-step consensus" or "double-key" approach (European Commission 1997, p. 7). According to this conception, which clearly reflects EU expectations, either region can propose a candidate. After the candidate state receives the approval of all the partners in its own region,

all ASEM Heads of State and Government have to make a consensus-based decision on its admission. When this two-key approach was codified in the AECF 2000 charter, a number of additional guidelines on future enlargement were added. First, ASEM, as an open and evolutionary process, should reinforce the wider Asia-Europe partnership. Second, enlargement should be conducted in a progressive manner. Third, each candidacy should be examined on the basis of its own merits and in light of its potential contribution to the ASEM process.

These rules are relatively broad. They see enlargement as an endemic feature of ASEM and a desirable development, the only condition being that it fits a strengthening partnership in which Europe and Asia as two distinct regions remain clearly associated (de Crombrugghe 2011a, p. 172). Nevertheless, the rules include certain unwritten implications and anticipations. Furthermore, they fail to address a number of questions that continue to affect the process today. These questions all relate to the extent to which the emphasis lies on ASEM being a region-to-region (or a so-called bloc-to-bloc) forum or rather a state-to-state Eurasian partnership. At the same time, they relate to ideational factors (what determines whether a country is labeled European or Asian?) as well as to what Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier (2002, p. 512) have called "constellations of bargaining power."

3.1 Regional Membership

First, following constructivist institutionalism, enlargement is shaped by ideational, cultural factors, including "community" or "cultural match" and the belief in a collective identity (Schimmelfennig and Sedelmeier 2002, p. 513). It is obvious that Asia and Europe as geography-based groupings representing regions that share a common identity are highly fluid and variable conceptions. From the outset, a wide variety of candidatures were on ASEM's table in order to make up the membership of each regional grouping. India, Pakistan, Australia and New Zealand, the European Free Trade Association (EFTA, consisting of Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein and Switzerland), Bulgaria, the Czech Republic, Hungary, Poland, Russia, Romania, Slovakia, Turkey and Ukraine had all expressed their interest to join (Robles 2008, p. 27). However, as ASEM can historically be seen as an offspring of the EU-ASEAN region-to-region relationship, a twofold setup revolving in a more restricted way around the European Union and an East Asian regional grouping centered on

ASEAN was chosen. These two regional organizations have been in command of definitions of what constitutes Asia and as Europe as geographical regions.

During ASEM's first decade, EU membership became the unwritten rule for joining the European group, thereby limiting the definition of Europe to the EU. This excluded countries such as Russia, a geographically Eurasian state, or Norway and Switzerland, not the members of the EU. For ASEM's European side, it was deemed essential that "the special character of the EU" was respected, and that "the Union as Union" was a key participant in ASEM, present in its own right through the Presidency of the Council and the Commission. For the EU, "the Union as Union must therefore remain at the core of the ASEM process" (European Commission 1997, p. 8). It was for this reason that in 2010 in the run-up to the Brussels summit, the EU declined to accept Russia as a member of the European group, as it was not a member of the EU (de Crombrugghe 2011a, p. 173). Croatia had to wait until it gained EU membership in 2013, before it could join ASEM the following year.

In Asia the partnership was built around ASEAN, which in ASEM's early years chose to include China, Korea, and Japan in the interregional gathering, thereby confining the definition of "Asia" to East Asia. Especially Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad played an important role, as he regarded ASEM's Asian grouping as a de facto realization of his failed, earlier proposal of 1990 to construct an East Asian Economic Group (EAEG). "Asian ASEM" was furthermore identical to Mahathir's East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) that came about within APEC in 1994. For these restricted views on what constitutes "Asia," Australia, and New Zealand were initially considered too "western" to join the partnership on the Asian side. The participation of India was another bone of contention. Its candidacy was supported in Europe, but Asian states feared that expansion to South Asia would burden ASEM with a new set of problems. This irked observers in countries such as India, who criticized Asia's "Confucian fringe" for reducing the region's vast landmass to "Chopsticks Asia" (Datta-Ray 1998). Russia formed another difficult case, as it was Eurasian, and was not considered distinctly European or Asian. During its first decade, ASEM's Asian grouping thus remained limited to the ASEAN+3 countries. The ASEM Summit in Helsinki in (2006) took the landmark decision to reverse this course, and formally expand the partnership beyond East Asia by accepting the membership of India, Pakistan, Mongolia, as proposed by the

Asian side. This set in motion an expansion process, which, through three further stages, enlarged ASEM to include countries across the whole Eurasian continent, at the same time underlining the fluidity of definitions of what constitutes a geographical, regional entity.

Ahead of the ASEM8 summit in Brussels in 2010, the joining of Australia, New Zealand, and Russia was not unproblematic. Since these states were not seen as fully-fledged "Asian," Singapore proposed the creation of a third geographical group which could house these three countries, and which in the future could also incorporate Central Asian states. As this seemingly contradicted ASEM's bi-regional character, Cambodia doctored a compromise, proposing a geographically undefined "temporary third category" which allowed Russia, in addition to Australia and New Zealand, to participate in the 2010 summit in Brussels (de Crombrugghe 2011a, pp. 174–175). The time-buying device of the "temporary third category" was officially abolished in 2012, and the three countries were accepted as belonging to the Asian regional grouping. The acronym NESA (denoting Northeast and South Asia) is currently used to refer to the 11 non-ASEAN countries within the Asian group. The issue relating to the fluidity of regional entities does not disappear, however. The fact that Australia, New Zealand, Kazakhstan, and Russia are all included in the Northeast and South Asia group shows the artificial nature of regional groupings. Furthermore, whether to brand countries such as Turkey or the Ukraine as belonging to the European or Asian region will remain a thorny issue. In conclusion, it can thus be said that the EU and ASEAN countries initially determined the ideas that shaped the respective regional communities, thereby constructing "Europe" and "Asia".

3.2 Regional Organizations as Drivers, and the Role of Norms and Values

A closely related issue concerns the tension between the driving role of the EU and ASEAN as regional organizations on the one hand, and ASEM's horizontal institutionalization of norms and values on the other. Of particular, salience here is the "automaticity" question, namely whether membership in either organization should automatically be linked with ASEM membership, even if norm-related objections could be raised to the candidate state's membership. This became clear already in 1997 when Myanmar joined ASEAN. The question of whether or not the undemocratic regime of Myanmar could also join

ASEM caused long-lasting disagreements between the EU and ASEAN. These culminated in 2004 in a critical freezing of relations, the cancellation of two ASEM ministerial meetings, and nearly the cancellation of the Hanoi ASEM5 summit (Keva and Gaens 2008, pp. 130–131). The EU opposed membership of Myanmar because of the country's authoritarian regime and its human rights violations. ASEAN partners, on the other hand, maintained that Myanmar, as a full-fledged ASEAN member, should also be included in ASEM. Only a compromise solution brokered by the Netherlands, in which the EU consented to Myanmar's participation albeit at a lower level of representation, prevented the cancellation of the 2004 summit, and allowed the process to move ahead. The case of Myanmar illustrated the fragile nature of the "double-key approach" for enlargement of the bi-regional institution, and its clash with potential norms-based objections.

At the same time, and not uncontroversial, the EU has always seen itself as a regional, integrated body with a special status in ASEM. Not only did the EU and its member states until 2012 claim exclusive representation of "Europe," it was also paramount for the EU that new member states would automatically be allowed to participate in ASEM. For the EU it was simply inconceivable that a newly accessed member state would not be allowed to participate in regional coordination in Brussels ahead of ASEM summits, for example, thereby excluding it from one part of the EU's common external policy. EU enlargement is seen as an ongoing process and full-fledged member states have equal rights to participate in the common policy-making process, including with regard to ASEM. In view of the EU's own expansion process, a moratorium on membership was, and still is, therefore not a feasible option. At the same time, as already mentioned in the case of Russia, non-EU members were refused as partners on the European side, that is, until 2012.

In theory, ASEM's double-key approach stipulated by the enlargement guidelines of the AECF2000 gives the Asian partners a chance to veto the joining of new EU member states to ASEM. Some Asian partner countries are therefore, not without reason, strongly of the opinion that there is no automatic correlation between EU membership and ASEM participation. Furthermore, for them, limiting European membership to the EU conflicts with ASEM's "open and evolutionary" nature. Especially after 2010, when the question of Russian membership was resolved, Asian countries increasingly took issue with the European group automatically linking EU membership and joining ASEM. For

Asian countries, it needed to be ensured that also non-EU European countries could accede to ASEM. In other words, the European group needed to "demonstrate that it did not view ASEM as a bloc-to-bloc cooperation, i.e. as a cooperation driven by the EU bloc on the one side while there was evidently no Asian bloc on the other side" (de Crombrugghe 2011a, p. 179).

The EU thereafter struck a compromise, expanding the European side to include non-EU European countries Norway and Switzerland and thereby setting an important precedent. The European grouping can henceforth more easily accept countries with which it already has close cooperation (as was the case with Norway and Switzerland). As non-EU participants, they are to some extent included in the preparation and coordination of ASEM issues, through informal participation in the EU's Council Working Group for Asia-Oceania (COASI). However, they are not expected to follow the common positions of the EU partners, making it even more difficult to maintain a common European voice in ASEM, and they are of course not involved in other affairs of the EU.

It remains unclear, however, whether a prospective member of either regional organization (EU or ASEAN) can join ASEM before it becomes a formal member state of that organization. In theory the EU can now more easily admit countries that are prospective candidates to join the EU, for example, Serbia, or even countries such as Ukraine that seek closer ties with Europe. But it is unlikely that these countries at this stage would be allowed into the decision-making process of the EU's foreign policy. Furthermore, would the EU object to the participation of Timor-Leste in ASEM for example before it officially accedes to ASEAN?

The role of the regional organizations in ASEM, the EU and ASEAN, has thus been slightly diluted in recent years. Nevertheless, not in the least driven by the EU, ASEM has sought to safeguard the bi-regional model. As already pointed out in Chap. 2 in this volume, the FMM10 (held in Hungary in 2011) confirmed that the bipolar (Europe-Asia) model of interregional cooperation had to be retained as ASEM enlarged (ASEM 2011). ASEAN, for its part, has sought to take on a role akin to that of the European Union in ASEM. It obtained a separate membership position in 2008, seeking to safeguard its "driving role" in the Asian regional grouping after the inclusion of India, Pakistan, and Mongolia. For some, ASEAN aimed to strengthen its image as a regional entity on a par with China and India, and as a credible interlocutor for

the EU (Camroux 2006, p. 33). Even so, the two regional organizations vastly differ. While the EU is a strongly integrated supra-national body, ASEAN emphasizes the principles of sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference, and state-to-state interaction. ASEM has thus turned into a hybrid forum, multilateral as well as interregional, and including state-to-state interaction as well as safeguarding a role for regional organizations.

3.3 The Issue of the Numerical Balance Between Both Regional Groupings

A further challenge deriving from ASEM's bi-regional setup concerns the numerical balance between the European and the Asian groupings. The linking between EU membership and the joining of ASEM led to a numerical imbalance between the European side (31 partners) and the Asian grouping (22 members). "Europe" outnumbering "Asia" has often been seen as a sign of unequal bargaining power, even if ASEM is primarily about informal dialogue. As a result, Asian ASEM expanded partly because the widening of the EU had to be matched by taking in additional members on the Asian side. Therefore, as the European side expanded due to EU widening, the Asian grouping emphasized the need to balance the tally, bringing in candidates on their side at the time as Europe. In other words, it is paradoxically partly the result of the EU's insistence on being treated as a regional entity, that the Asian grouping became more heterogeneous and less coherent as a regional actor.

As the EU implicitly used to link EU membership with ASEM membership, it was coerced to show extensive flexibility in allowing the Asian grouping to select its own new partners. The accession of Romania and Bulgaria to the EU in 2007 therefore excluded a status quo in Asian ASEM membership, and led to the acceptance of applications by India, Pakistan, and Mongolia (Loewen 2010, p. 21). As another example, the last-minute joining of Kazakhstan in 2014 at the Milan summit was partly a way to retain a more balanced setup after Croatia joined the European side. Political instability in Turkey and geo-political sensitivities relating to the application of Ukraine exclude the joining of these countries in the near future. However, the numerical imbalance between "Europe" and "Asia" in ASEM is an additional reason why Serbia, Turkey, and Ukraine, the new candidates to join ASEM on the European side, still have to wait in the sidelines for the time being.

4 The Impact of Enlargement

ASEM's extensive process of enlargement has had a wide-ranging impact on the institution and the dialogue process, bringing about important challenges. This section explores the consequences of enlargement, in particular for the forum's cooperation on the ground and coordination of the process.

4.1 Cooperation and Working Methods: Issue-Based Leadership (IBL)

Enlargement has an undeniable impact, not only on informal dialogue, but also on ASEM's methods for (non-binding) cooperation. ASEM has struggled to implement concrete projects, in focused areas where the forum's specific approach can make a difference, and through initiatives that are not an end as such, but are linked back to and supportive of the dialogue.

As Julie Gilson (2012, p. 397) has pointed out, ASEM's growth into a large trans-regional forum in which the interregional distinctiveness has weakened can be seen as a blessing in disguise. The forum now offers more opportunities to focus on issues of common concern and interest through an issue-led approach. In recent years, ASEM has been increasingly focusing on "variable geometry," or the idea that different interests and priorities should allow for the shaping of informal functional groups of states that drive forward tangible cooperation through "coalitions." The concept of such an "issue-based leadership" (IBL) as guiding tool was first launched at the Helsinki ASEM6 summit in 2006. The ASEM7 summit in Beijing (2008) confirmed the principle, and listed 14 issue areas each driven forward by a group of partners, both Asian and European, that function as issue/sectoral leaders or shepherds for a term of 4 years (ASEM 2008). IBL's implementation after that, however, was highly flawed, suffering from low commitment, little information sharing and follow-up. India, the organizer of the eleventh ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting, revived the idea in 2013, renaming it "tangible cooperation." The FMM added a "collated list of interested ASEM members for tangible cooperation" as an annex to the chair's statement, including 12 areas in which countries could cooperate "with like-minded members" (ASEM 2013). The Milan summit added a further 4 areas, and confirmed a list of groups of interested members in 16 different issue areas (ASEM 2014 annex 3). The FMM12, held in Luxemburg

in 2015, upheld 19 tangible cooperation areas (ASEM 2015, Annex 2). The most recent anniversary summit held in Ulaanbaatar added one "agreed priority area of cooperation," namely youth cooperation, to bring the total tally to 20 areas. Each area now comprises between 2 and 24 participating partner countries (ASEM 2016, Annex 2).[4]

Also in the EU the principle of "issue-based leadership" exists, and, under the name of "enhanced cooperation," is enshrined in the Lisbon Treaty. Applying this arrangement, Member States can move forward at different speeds and toward different goals, as long as it furthers the objectives and interests of the EU. In a similar way, through its variable geometry, ASEM can in principle cater to the individual political agendas of member states, in order to complement cooperation in other fora. The forum can provide for the creation of alliances, in the sense of "straightforward arrangements for non-binding collaboration" that allow for diversity among participants and for ad hoc and loose coalition building for issue-specific ends (Gilson 2012, p. 397).

However, the return of "issue-based leadership" under the banner of "tangible cooperation" is struggling with uneven implementation. In general, Asian countries, not in the least China and India, seem the most willing to drive cooperation forward. Major European players are less visible, and the involvement in initiatives of larger EU Member States has decreased. Looking at the latest Tangible Cooperation List, the EU as a regional entity is included in only one initiative (disaster management). The UK is found in two project areas, and France only participates in one (human rights promotion and protection), whereas Germany is absent altogether. Smaller member states, however, are more involved. Cyprus and Finland participate in ten areas each, Austria and Lithuania in seven, and Hungary in six (ASEM 2016, Annex 2).

Furthermore, follow-up after the FMM in New Delhi has been flawed. The growth in areas of cooperation is encouraging, but is unclear to what extent these groups of countries are "tangibly" cooperating, or even to what extent they are committed to the project. It is also not clear where "ownership" of groups of clustered initiatives lies. Transparency is lacking, and there is very little information sharing and follow-up. Tensions may also exist at the national level, between the foreign ministry's proposal of inclusion in a project, coupled with oversight responsibilities on the one hand, and the so-called line ministry in charge of implementation on the other.

Nevertheless, IBL is very much in line with ASEM's ongoing enlargement process, offering opportunities for alliance building in a certain

issue area. The instrument is furthermore in line with developments in other fora, such as APEC and the UN. In APEC, for example, a number of members jointly undertake self-funded projects. Many of them promote the sharing of information and best practices among members. This is based on the idea that different interests and priorities should allow for the shaping of informal functional groups of states that drive forward tangible cooperation through working groups. Similar to the idea of "enhanced cooperation" in the EU, members of ASEM should also be allowed to select issues of interest "as if from a menu," and drive related initiatives and projects forward, as long as they rank under the ASEM vision and its common objectives. Under "Variable Geometry ASEM," a group of likeminded partners from both Europe and Asia can jointly pursue common objectives, with the understanding that others can get involved at a later stage. In order to streamline "tangible cooperation," leaders would need to provide the IBL tool with a clear mandate, based on focused issues, and mechanisms for coordination, reporting, and evaluation would need to be established.[5] Even so, issue-based leadership is not the only possible way forward (see, e.g., the ideas raised in Chap. 8 in this volume).

4.2 Coordination of the Process

Membership expansion inevitably places additional strains on the logistical and managerial side of the ASEM forum. Effective and smooth coordination, administrative support, and functional follow-up increasingly form challenges as not only the number of members grows but also as meetings and initiatives proliferate. It seems therefore almost inevitable to consider taking a further step in strengthening institutional coordination mechanisms.

Proposals and attempts to streamline ASEM coordination are not new. The Asia-Europe Vision Group (AEVG 1999) already in 1999 proposed the creation of a "lean but effective secretariat" as a point of communication and coordination, and as a focus for continuity also between summits. The ASEM5 summit (2004) made reference to the possibility of creating a secretariat "at an appropriate time," but numerous ASEM partners have continued to voice strong resistance against increased institutionalization. As a form of compromise, the ASEM Virtual Secretariat (AVS) was inaugurated at ASEM6 in Helsinki in (2006).[6] The AVS was supposed to become the main coordinating instrument, particularly in view of the increase of initiatives, ministerial meetings, and sectoral

SOM, but the experiment never really took off. The Virtual Secretariat ended before it had well started.

Since 2006, several other attempts have been made to implement incremental measures in order to improve coordinating mechanisms. In 2009, the European Commission funded the "ASEM8 Coordinating Office" (known as the ASEM8 Coordination Team or TASC), an ad hoc one-year initiative to prepare, coordinate, and support the ASEM8 Summit in Brussels.[7] The TASC included two full-time employees and even established an ASEM intranet. The EU-funded TASC initiative can be seen as having provided a model for the creation of a Technical Support Unit, called ASEM Chairman Support Group (ACSG), ahead of the 2012 summit in Laos. This unit, funded by ASEM members, integrated the hosts of the upcoming summit and FMM in the coordination mechanism "from summit to summit," something that had been called for already in the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM (2006). However, neither the ensuing FMM in New Delhi (2013) nor the summit in Milan (2014) made mention of the ACSG, implying the demise of yet another effort to strengthen coordination. In addition, ASEM has started experimenting with project-based agencies or "sectoral secretariats" to ensure continuity and follow-up, including the ASEM Education Secretariat created in 2009.

It is clear that, when it comes to the implementation of collaborative initiatives based on "tangible cooperation," inclusive and comprehensive membership impedes collective action. The question, then, is whether ASEM can still afford not to establish smoother management in the form of a more permanent liaison office, in view of the continuing enlargement process. In practice, a secretariat "would help keep records, create templates, streamline procedures, facilitate communication, foster transparency, and thus would provide institutional memory and ensure that every next step would take into account what had been done before or attempted before" (Vandenkendelaere 2011, p. 61). In addition, it would offer the following advantages:

- It would greatly enhance ASEM's achievement orientation, increase public awareness, and equip ASEM to deal with the growing complexity of the process.
- A secretariat could rekindle the interest of some European governments that seem to have lost their active interest in the process.
- ASEM would no longer need to depend on frequently transferred national officials in order to retain its institutional memory.

- It would provide professional, neutral, and objective service to all ASEM members (de Crombrugghe 2011a: 185). Importantly, it would treat all partners equally, which would be to the benefit of the less-developed countries in ASEM.
- Questions about the geographical representativeness of coordinators would no longer be relevant (de Crombrugghe 2011a: 185).
- It could avoid problems related to the lack of experience, expertise, or logistical resources that smaller, less-developed or less-experienced countries face when being in charge of organizing meetings or summits. This would enhance their effective participation in ASEM events. It would also prevent larger non-coordinator states from having a too strong impact on relatively weak coordinators.
- It can offer a solution to the uncontrolled proliferation of initiatives, and avoid the tendency to propose initiatives for initiatives' sake (the so-called laundry list or Christmas tree phenomenon). It can make sure that all partners are on board on a timely basis, streamline ASEM projects, and hold the different strands of initiatives together. It can prevent that ASEM loses track of activities conducted under its label (see de Crombrugghe 2011b: 42), or that initiatives lack objectivity or transparency. Importantly, it can compile and circulate information, and ensure follow-up.

Having said that, setting up a secretariat would bring about issues related to staffing, funding and location, and could even conflict with the existing EU coordination machinery. And to a certain extent the EU as ASEM's only permanent coordinator already functions as a de facto secretariat. Nevertheless, the positive experience with the ASEM8 Coordinating Office, TASC) funded by the European Commission, shows that also in the EU resistance against "creeping institutionalization" may be decreasing. Furthermore, as shown in Chap. 2, quite a few ASEM-related institutions exist, even if they are not very visible.

5 Conclusion

Has ASEM's far-reaching enlargement process during the past decade made the forum more sluggish and inefficient? Has expansion into sub-regions such as South Asia, Australasia, and Central Asia diluted an already fragile regional cohesion in the Asian grouping? Has the admission of non-EU states burdened the forum with a new set of problems on the European side? Or has enlargement on the other hand enhanced

ASEM's critical mass, and provides greater dynamism to both dialogue and cooperation, making the partnership "better equipped to tackle present and future global challenges" as the Helsinki Declaration on the Future of ASEM (ASEM 6 annex) contended?

New members often display a proactive and enthusiastic attitude toward ASEM, and it can therefore not be denied that enlargement has added new vigor to the forum and its discussions, as a recent discussion paper contends (Islam 2015, p. 9). Many new members are very eager and active, injecting new energy into certain issue areas. Furthermore, ASEM enlargement is a sign that it has evolved together with important changes in the global environment. These include for example increased multipolarity as a result of the emergence of new global players, and a transformation of interregionalism, from pure region-to-region relations to more diffuse transregional frameworks, as shown in Chap. 2.

It is clear that ASEM's nature has changed radically from the initial 25 + 1 setup to the current 51 + 2 structure. Enlargement undeniably has a strong impact on the forum's methods of cooperation and means of coordination. Yet, perhaps rather than asking whether enlargement is a sign of strength or not, the question should be raised how expansion can be made into an asset to make ASEM a more streamlined, efficient, and visible forum, and transform it from a "good-to-have" forum into a "must-have" forum connecting Europe and Asia. This chapter has contended that ASEM enlargement should be seen as a catalyst to revitalize ASEM, in particular by implementing variable geometry through working groups for tangible outcomes, and by strengthening coordination and management.

Notes

1. Austria, Belgium, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Ireland, Italy, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Portugal, Spain, Sweden, and the United Kingdom.
2. These included Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand, the countries that founded the Association in 1967, in addition to Brunei Darussalam and Vietnam who joined ASEAN in 1984 and 1995, respectively.
3. Cyprus, Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Malta, Poland, Slovakia and Slovenia.
4. "Disaster management and mitigation" has 24 participating partners, but only two countries each are the driving force behind "Technologies for diagnostics" and "Youth cooperation".

5. As recommended by "The Future of ASEM" workshop, held in Singapore on 4 April 2008, and organized by the Asia-Europe Foundation, the China Institute of International Affairs, and the European Institute of Asian Studies.
6. Japan was the prime mover behind the initiative to establish a virtual secretariat, endorsed by the Seventh Foreign Ministers' Meeting in Kyoto (ASEM 2005).
7. See the Chair's statement of ASEM FMM9, paragraph 30 (ASEM 2009).

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CHAPTER 10

ASEM for Europe: One Conduit Among Many

Gauri Khandekar

1 Introduction

Europe and Asia share a protracted, intertwined history and recognize their common destiny. Europeans have for long looked eastward for strategic and cultural reasons, and it comes as no surprise that European countries continue to pursue ties with Asia, the fastest growing region in the world, and Europe's top trading partner region. Although the ancient Silk Route that once connected Europe to Asia has never been resurrected to the same extent, contemporary Europe-Asia relations strive to achieve the same degree of interregional connectedness.

ASEM forms an integral part of the interaction between Europe and Asia at both an interregional level and among the group of countries involved. European and Asian countries interact at many levels and have developed comprehensive mechanisms for cooperation and dialogue at a bilateral level. ASEM was established when both sides detected a void in communication and the need to speak to each other at a regional level. ASEM serves two crucial functions: it is the only

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platform for Europe-Asia dialogue at an intercontinental level, and it is the European strategic equivalent to the American-led Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), which brings together the USA and 20 other Pacific Rim member countries.

At its core, ASEM embodies the European zeal for multilateralism and plurilateral engagement while promoting the gospel of regional integration for peace and prosperity. It is also a potent policy tool to promote European engagement in Asia and vice versa, and provides the opportunity for both regions to tackle regional and global challenges together. Not yet an institutionalized formal organization, ASEM's key role is to enhance dialogue. And although ASEM has often been criticized as a talk shop, it has helped both regions to explore areas for cooperation.

This chapter explores European perceptions of ASEM as a platform over the forum's two-decade history. The chapter first examines Asia-Europe relations to set the analysis into context. It then looks closely at the development of ASEM through the European perspective. European priorities vis-à-vis ASEM will subsequently be explored. Although ASEM was recognized as a strategic necessity at its inception, this chapter assesses whether Europe still sees ASEM through the same lens. Finally, the chapter endeavors to rationalize whether ASEM will be of much importance to Europe in its third decade given various geopolitical considerations that shall also be discussed.

2 Framework of Europe-Asia Relations

Modern-day Europe-Asia relations are built around an elaborate multi-tiered, multi-themed framework. Thematic areas for cooperation span wide: from development and poverty reduction, to trade and investment, science and technology, space exploration, security, civil society relations, tourism, and so on. A multi-tiered framework (within the context of the European Union) is based on a solid foundation of bilateral relations between individual European and Asian countries as well as with regional fora in Asia like the Association for South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) or others. Atop this layer sits an echelon of bilateral strategic partnerships between individual European Union member states and Asian countries, a set of special partnerships that recognize the relationship as strategically important and involves more complex areas of cooperation as compared to a normal bilateral relationship. The third layer consists of the supranational

level—EU institutional relations with Asian countries and Asia's regional fora. This does not include other multilateral fora in which the European Union and Asian countries meet like the G20 or the United Nations (UN). Over this structure lies the tier of EU strategic partnerships. The EU has a total of ten strategic partnerships globally,[1] five of which are Asian members of ASEM: Russia, India, China, Japan and South Korea. The highest layer is formed by ASEM as the only platform that brings together all its members. Cooperation within ASEM too covers numerous thematic areas.

Norway and Switzerland have their own extensive networks of bilateral relations with Asia in addition to the layer formed at the level of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), a regional trade organization and free trade area consisting of Iceland, Liechtenstein, Norway, and Switzerland, that has its own mechanisms for relations with Asia, in particular via free trade agreements (FTA).

This multi-themed, multitiered cooperation structure is a highly complex mechanism for interaction, which has over the years guaranteed a sophisticated level of engagement between two key global regions. The structure has sustained interface between Europe and Asia at all levels of society: leaders, officials, experts, civil society, academic experts, businesses, and so on. There is no dearth of communication between Europe and Asia. Some academic experts have even lamented that the existing mechanisms are far too many in number. Yet, the various echelons and mechanisms thus far seem to be well interlinked and streamlined given the growth of Europe-Asia relations, which will be discussed below.

3 Europe-Asia Relations

This section focuses primarily on the EU and its member states' relations with Asia. The EU as the erstwhile European Economic Community (EEC) since the 1960s began to construct its own bilateral partnerships with Asian countries in complement to EU member states' existing bilateral relations with Asian countries. For the most part, the EU's relationship with Asia was development and aid oriented, but also delivered significant outcomes across various other sectors. The initial EU focus on poverty reduction and socio-economic reforms was prominent and some progress toward country self-sufficiency across Asia can be accorded to EC aid.[2] The EU has also sought to promote regional integration in Asia and as ASEAN's first dialogue partner has been instrumental in sharing

technical information on regional integration and institution building since the early 70s. The EU and its member states remain the largest aid donors, development partners, and investors across Asia.

With the end of the Cold War, the EU's growing regional integration paralleled economic liberalization across Asia. As the EU became a stronger, more integrated entity, the focus of the EU's relationships with Asia's then low-income economies gradually shifted to commerce as the attention turned toward economics and growth. Socialism with Chinese Characters, China's economic reform policy, initiated in December 1978 and led by Chinese reformist Deng Xiaoping was already in its second stage but begun to pick up speed in the early 90s when the collapse of the Soviet Bloc added new impetus to internal reforms in the country. It was then, with economic liberalization policies set out by India, the Philippines and then Vietnam, that the center of gravity of the global economy increasingly began to tilt toward Asia. Despite Japan's "Lost Decade" with the collapse of its financial bubble and stock market crash, Asia in general made large progress. The emergence of the four Asian Tigers: South Korea, Hong Kong, Taiwan and Singapore further fueled the trend. Until the 2000s, the EU was the largest trade partner of all Asian countries.

Around the turn of the millennium, an aggressive focus on economics and commerce gathered much criticism for the EU, which was accused of mercantilism. EU member states followed their individual geoeconomic approaches in Asia often competing with each other and the EU for trade and investment deals in Asian capitals. Concurrent to its image as a commercial giant in Asia, the EU failed to develop solid political relations with Asia. The EU has had an upstream swim in this regard. For one, it struggled to surmount the colonial legacies of its constituent member states in Asia and is viewed till date with much suspicion across Asia. In the construct of its individual identity, the EU has had immense difficulties in conveying the exact nature and working of its sui generis structure to a continent which focuses on the Westphalian notion of the nation state. Asia still grapples with understanding the EU and public diplomacy efforts by the EU in Asia although growing remains weak. Moreover, the EU's capacity to deliver on security cooperation in the Asian context is circumscribed. In turn, Asia's political and cultural diversity has not helped the EU in developing a viable common EU-Asia strategy either. As a result, the EU's focus on Asia became synonymous

to its relations with China and, to a lesser extent, India, a fact much reviled by other Asian countries.

The EU has not been completely successful in connecting with Asia and has had a significant number of ups and downs. The EU's biggest challenge arguably has been the values divide with Asia. The place of norms and the values-oriented approach in overall EU foreign policy toward Asia has been highly complex. The EU's focus on human rights and the promotion of liberal values across Asia has not been received well in Asia and Asia complains of EU moral hectoring. Recognizing the potential of a rapidly rising Asia, EU member states have been keen on exploring commercial gains in Asia, at times at the expense of normative priorities. At the same time, a common values-oriented approach with the same Asian countries was delegated to the EU. In return, Asian nations chose to do business with and via individual EU member states rather than directly engage with the EU. While human rights and good governance clauses and conditionality have been standard EU practice, they are rejected across a number of countries in Asia. As interdependencies deepened, and Asia's economic strength grew, the EU itself has not managed to maintain a balance in its overall normative focus that has narrowed due to its waning global influence. Its relations with China in particular have come under the spotlight. China's weakening record on human rights has stood out against its growing trade and political relations with the EU. For instance, while the EU chose to do business with communist, single-party led China, it ignored the then dictatorial regime of Myanmar and continues to disregard democratic Taiwan.

The EU further faced an internal strife. Its member states have consciously worked to limit the EU's global ambitions and prioritized individual interests over common benefits. The resulting common EU policies have largely been the lowest common denominator that emerged through consensus. Internal inconsistencies and incoherence have over the years resulted in a weak image of the EU, in which Asia has it found hard to place its trust. Its political engagement with Asia has suffered for various other reasons: over the years EU priorities changed with every 6 month rotating member state Presidency of the EU, which compromised consistency; visibility in Asia was not maintained through regular political visits; permanent representations until recently were underdeveloped and understaffed; until 2015, the EU did not have an individual Ambassador to ASEAN; and intra-institutional coordination was not robust in projecting a common EU voice. Despite the solid base of its

role in development and poverty reduction across Asia (the EU's role in Asia's civil society empowerment too has been commendable), the EU has been unable to market itself well in the region. But mostly, Asia has been for many years and till recently, a far low priority agenda item for the EU as compared to other regions, than it should be.

For all the above reasons, the EU's overall relationship with Asia has fared poorly. Institutionally, the EU has been unable to strategize its relations with Asia with a clear set of interests and goals. This stems mainly from the fact that a viable, forward-looking Asia strategy is still missing. With India, the EU erred in looking at the country through the glitter of its emergence too quickly while overlooking its painful development realities. It also failed to narrow down its list of priorities for years (its 2006 Joint Action Plan with India covered an endless wish list with undefined targets). Given the small size of India's Ministry of External Affairs (700 personnel) and India's limited penchant for the EU, many initiatives remained and still remain in the pipeline for years. A free trade accord (talks initiated in 2007) still awaits conclusion after nearly 10 years of negotiations. China has been viewed with much suspicion, and the EU has been unclear in defining the type of relationship it wants with the Asian giant. While China's rise and economic potential have been revered in the EU, it failed to balance its normative approach with the country, foregoing at times its value based approach for short-term commercial gains. After the Tiananmen Square incident, EU-China relations soured with the EU embargo on arms sales to China. The EU also refused to recognize China's demands for Market Economy Status. At the same time, growing interdependencies with China have led to the EU to soften its criticisms on Chinese abuses of human rights and various trade policy discrepancies. The EU financial and debt crises of 2008 changed the EU-China relationship drastically. In the hopes that Chinese reserves would be offered to save a sinking Eurozone, the EU found itself much more inclined at pleasing Beijing than at upholding its own interests. At the 2012 EU-China Summit for instance, various trade cases against China were stalled for the Chinese visit and a Press Conference was suspended to save the Chinese leadership embarrassing questions on Tibet, Taiwan and various human rights abuses.

Until 2015, when the EU agreed to a "partnership with a strategic purpose" (European Commission 2015) with ASEAN, the EU was not greatly forthcoming or consistent. ASEAN member countries have long complained of neglect stemming from the EU's overwhelming focus

on China and India while overlooking a sister regional organization. ASEAN officials visibly criticized the lack of political visits from top EU leaders for a period of 5 years between 2007 and 2012 until EU High Representative Catherine Ashton's visit in 2013. EU visibility in the region has greatly improved since. The EU has also committed to helping ASEAN realize its ambition of an ASEAN Economic Community and its regional connectivity plans. But there is little the EU can do in terms of ASEAN's myriad security challenges. The South China Sea dispute in particular which involves a number of ASEAN member countries and China is one of the top challenges for the region. But both China and ASEAN are important partners for the EU, which puts the latter in a difficult position. Beyond vocal support and diplomatic pressure, there is little much else that the EU can do. While political engagement with ASEAN has been low-key, the EU's trade relationship with ASEAN has not fulfilled its full potential either.[3] The EU embarked on a region-to-region free trade project with ASEAN in May 2007, which was scheduled to be completed by 2015. But 2 years into negotiations the EU suspended talks, citing incompatible legal frameworks within ASEAN; the disparities created by two of ASEAN's least developing countries (LDCs) already benefiting from the EU's Everything but Arms (EBA) treaty; and Myanmar's bad human rights record. Myanmar had been a sore spot for the EU in Asia. The EU has pursued a policy of isolation vis-à-vis Myanmar, ostracizing the repressive military regime that governed the country for nearly five decades. A string of stringent EU sanctions against Myanmar was already in place but the brutal crushing of the saffron revolution in Myanmar in September 2007 found consensus among EU member states to cease all relations with the country. While a region-to-region EU-ASEAN FTA would have helped incentivize further regional integration within ASEAN and engender a positive engagement of Myanmar, aside from adding 2 to ASEAN's GDP by 2020 and a matching 2% in the EU's total exports; the EU replaced the regional track with a slower track offer of bilateral FTAs to seven of ASEAN's ten members. Not one of these FTAs has entered into force as yet at the time of writing.

In East Asia, the EU's engagement on North Korea has lacked visibility and vigor. As a global actor with global player ambitions, it remains absent from the Six-Party Talks, a forum which includes the USA, Russia, Japan, China, North and South Korea to mediate a peaceful resolution to North Korea's nuclear program. While talks were discontinued

in 2009, they may resume in the coming years. It would be an important framework for the EU to be part of and one in which it could contribute effectively given the EU's image as a comparatively more neutral non-security player. The EU's relationship with China plays a heavy role in its relationships with East Asian nations. Raising the North Korea issue silently behind doors with China has not brought about much change in China's conciliatory attitude toward North Korea. Given that the EU accords to the One-China policy, it eschews any official recognition of Taiwan despite its shared democratic values with the island. Taiwan's requests for an FTA with the EU to boost its bilateral commercial relations have not been received positively and have been shrouded under the nomenclature of an "Economic Cooperation Agreement." The East China Sea dispute, which involves Japan, China, and Taiwan, is one of Asia's most high-profile maritime disputes. But there is little the EU can do despite increasing tensions in the area. For instance, given that China is the EU's second largest trade partner after the USA, there has been no talk of any sanctions against China.

The EU's involvement in other security issues remains limited too. Counterterrorism cooperation for instance has not really proved effective and Asian states which have far-reaching cooperation with individual EU member states remain skeptical of the added value of cooperating with the EU, an organization which does not have its own intelligence, spy services, police or judicial body. A stable, dynamically growing Asia is in the EU's interests. Asia's security issues are complex and numerous, and its interstate relations in particular are frictional. Realistically, the EU cannot resolve all or perhaps even any of Asia's security issues but can certainly aim to play a vital role in Asian security. While an extensive hard security role in Asia would certainly be implausible, the EU can help in addressing security issues in Asia given that the notion of security in the twenty-first century has expanded considerably. A number of EU-Asia analysts agree with this fact. According to Shada Islam, the notion of security goes beyond military spending and underlines the role of preventive diplomacy and conflict resolution (Brussels Think Tank Dialogue 2014). For Jonas Parello-Plesner, "Europe has considerable experience in tackling new security threats that could be useful to Asia" (Parello-Plesner 2012). There is much the EU could do—mediate in maritime disputes, build Asian competence on anti-piracy efforts especially in Asia's important maritime bottlenecks, enhance cooperation on counter-terrorism and anti-insurgency, engage disputing nations constructively,

help with confidence building measures, etc. Asian diplomats regularly encourage the EU to engage with them in disaster reduction and preparedness issues, emergency response and resource management issues, where the EU has both expertise and capabilities. The EU has been active in non-traditional security cooperation in Asia but the potential to expand cooperation enough to make a significant difference is large. Asia as a region faces the largest amount of natural disasters and its economies face the greatest risk from them. According to Maplecroft, natural disasters in 2011 alone cost Asia around 380 billion USD. Europe has vital expertise and resources it can share. Moreover, the EU and its member states together have the world's largest diplomatic network in Asia. Europe's role if any could instead be to prioritize diplomacy, promote stability and ensure the provision of effective mechanisms to address concerns. While Europe may not be a security actor, it is a diplomatic heavyweight.

4 ASEM: Added Value or Added Inconvenience?

For Europe, Asia is important. It is not only the global growth engine but also houses some of the biggest global security hotspots ranging from the Kashmir territorial dispute between nuclear-armed neighbors India and Pakistan, to the South and East China Sea disputes that affect major global sea trade routes, to a belligerent North Korea providing a constant source of existential threat to its neighbors, among numerous others. Both elements of growth and security in Asia have a direct impact on core European interests. ASEM therefore presents a forum for Europe-Asia dialogue and the ability to explore possible avenues for engagement. More importantly, it is the only large-scale global forum in which the USA is not present. The absence of the USA in ASEM allows for the maximization of focus on Europe-Asia engagement.

Nonetheless, the overall significance of Asia to Europe must be put into context. Europe's biggest foreign policy priorities concern its neighborhood both to its East (Russia, Balkans, South Caucuses) and South (the Middle East and North Africa) and the transatlantic relationship with the USA. Moreover not all EU member states prioritize the same foreign policy issues. As compared to the initial years of ASEM, the EU today faces far greater challenges that are internal and have an existential nature. Today in effect, EU challenges are more internal than external. Brexit or the impending British exit from the EU represents the biggest

EU preoccupation for the next decade even according to the most conservative assessments. The EU and the Eurozone in particular (the 19 member states of the EU which have the euro for their currency and belong to a monetary union) have not yet fully overcome its fiscal debt and financial crises. Austerity remains the norm across numerous EU member states. The ongoing migration crisis in Europe stemming from conflicts in Syria and Iraq in particular has presented a formidable challenge to the EU over the past 3 years threatening to unravel decades of integration efforts and has called into question one of the most fundamental principles underlining European cooperation—freedom of movement. Terrorism given its transnational nature represents a similar threat to Europe. Asia thus forms a low overall priority in this challenges matrix despite the fact that Asia remains Europe's top trading region.

ASEM was invented to draw Europe and Asia closer to bridge the gap between two regions. However, this region-to-region engagement was designed as a fundamentally intergovernmental meeting. This inherently means a multiplicity of actors as opposed to a summit between two single regional entities with precise region-wide priorities, concerns, or ideas. The multiplicity of actors means that each member nation seeks to bring to and take from ASEM elements that conform to their own perceived priority. Within ASEM, Europe does not engage as a single region with Asia: the EU and each of its member states are represented separately. While the EU institutions chair and lead the process from the European side, each European ASEM member has a different priority vis-à-vis ASEM and brings its individual preference to the table.

It is possible to conjecture a European regional perception of ASEM as a forum. Despite its apparent strategic importance, ASEM remains an uninstitutionalized platform bereft of any formal secretariat. The will among European nations to institutionalize ASEM has been absent. Most Europeans have preferred for ASEM to remain ad hoc as the forum's main purpose is seen to be a vehicle for interregional dialogue rather than an agora for cooperation. Although a certain degree of sovereignty has been ceded to the EU in matters of foreign affairs, EU member states accord more priority to their individual bilateral foreign relations rather than to those supported by the forum. The ASEM budget therefore is extremely poor and the process is a more symbolic diplomatic effort than a strategic undertaking.

While all European members of ASEM engage actively in the various technocratic meetings that form the bulk of the ASEM process, that

is, the meetings of various officials, parliamentarians and civil society, it is possible to assess priorities vis-à-vis ASEM within the EU by grouping three different sets of EU member states together: big EU member states, the Nordic EU member states and Central and Eastern EU member states.

For the big EU member states—the UK, France, Germany, Italy and Spain—relations with Asia are well developed. These countries have national embassies and a large diplomatic network in virtually all ASEM's Asian member countries. Bilateral partnerships are intricately developed across a variety of themes and access to the highest political levels is trouble-free. For these member countries, the most attractive aspects of ASEM are the opportunities to further enhance economic ties and to tackle the big challenges with Asian leaders all while underlining global engagement. For example, at the ASEM Summit in London in 1998, the UK chose to advertise itself as an economic "powerhouse" and Asia's "gateway" to Europe while proposing the establishment of the ASEM Trust Fund (Bersick 2002). The ASEM business summit in particular is attractive and participation of the big EU member states is large. The biennial summit offers the most visibility to the ASEM process. In particular for issues which might prove too contentious for big EU member states to raise at the bilateral level given they might jeopardize the bilateral partnership, the ASEM summit level offers a less controversial yet visible platform to exercise leadership. More recently, at the sidelines of the ASEM summit in 2014 in Milan, the presidents of Russia and Ukraine met with German Chancellor Angela Merkel, French President Francois Hollande, British Prime Minister David Cameron, Italian Prime Minister Matteo Renzi and European Commission President Jose Manuel Barroso where the Ukraine crisis was discussed (Zenarro 2014). Although there was no major breakthrough, talks were described as constructive and provided the big EU member states a chance to demonstrate to domestic publics that the Ukraine issue is priority and has been taken up at multiple fora. For the big EU member states, engagement on major global issues and economics is most attractive. Other ASEM processes do not appeal as much in comparison. This is demonstrated by the fact that the big EU member states participate in the least number of Tangible Cooperation Areas as compared to other participating EU members. Germany participates in no groups (ASEM 2016). Tangible Cooperation Areas are smaller thematic groups or clusters in which ASEM member countries work voluntarily as a means of delivering

more tangible results through ASEM. The initiative was a proposal of the Indian government at the 12th ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting (FMM) held in New Delhi, India, in November 2013. As of the 11th ASEM Summit held in Mongolia in 2016, there are now 20 "tangible cooperation areas," which include disaster management, renewable energy, higher education, connectivity, and information technology among others.

Nordic EU member states like Sweden, Finland and Denmark have extensive diplomatic networks in Asia too, but to a lesser strength than the big EU member states. Asia, and in particular China and Japan, has long been recognized as a major market region. Finnish and Swedish companies like Nokia and Erickson have held market leadership in Asia's electronic appliances markets before the smart phone revolution led by Apple and Samsung. Today, China is one of the top five trading partners of all Nordic EU member states. Nordic EU member states in Asia have most actively been engaged in terms of development and humanitarian aid and the promotion of democratic values and human rights. The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Informal Seminar on Human Rights was launched in 1997 by Sweden and France, one of the longest lasting components of ASEM Tangible Cooperation. A number of Nordic and in particular Danish NGOs have been active in Asia. Climate change and sustainability are also priority issues given the Nordic nations are highly vulnerable to climate change. Sweden, for instance, contributes the highest amount of funds per capita to the United Nations (UN) Green Climate Fund.

Nonetheless, Nordic EU member states have a more territorial approach to foreign policy, which is largely limited to Europe and its Eastern neighborhood towards Russia as compared to a global strategy espoused, by the larger EU member states. The UK, France, Germany, Italy, and even Spain in contrast traditionally have held a global foreign policy outlook and hold ambitions for global leadership. The UK and France are permanent members of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), while Germany has long campaigned to become a permanent member of the UNSC. The UK, France and Spain have an extended global colonial history and actively exercise linguistic soft power in particular. In comparison, Nordic countries do not have cultural institutes with a system of permanent offices in Asia like the UK British Council, Germany's Goethe Institute or the French Centre Culturel Français.

Nordic EU member states in multilateral settings and likewise with relations to Asia, therefore, tend to prioritize issues thematically which are seen perceived to form synergies with their own national priorities. These include climate change and sustainability, human rights and democracy, and education. Assessing Nordic member states participation in ASEM's list of 20 Tangible Cooperation Areas gives an insight into the areas prioritized by these countries. The tangible cooperation areas of ASEM in which the Scandinavian EU member states participate include the follow: Promotion and protection of human rights, Energy Efficiency and Sustainability, Education And Human Resources Development, Vocational Training & Skills Development, Higher Education, Energy Efficiency Technologies, Renewable Energy: Mitigation, Adaptation, Financing and Technological Innovations, Efficient and Sustainable Water Management, Innovations in Water & Waste Management, Disaster Management and Mitigation, Building Rescue and Relief Capacities, Technologies and Innovation in Rescue Equipments & Techniques and SME Cooperation (ASEM 2016). Nordic leadership in ASEM therefore is issue based and leans toward sustainability, given there is little receptivity in Asia as concerns normative issues. With regard to the future direction of ASEM as outlined at the 11th ASEM Summit in Mongolia "Partnership for the Future through Connectivity," Nordic leadership can be expected to continue in ensuring that interregional connectivity is sustainable and green. Given ASEM's growing focus on urban development in Asia, the role of green technologies and sustainable urbanization will remain a priority.

Central and Eastern European (CEE) countries remain the least active in Asia as compared to the other two groups of EU member states assessed above. Their diplomatic presence in Asia is limited and most central and eastern EU member states do not have embassies in all Asian countries, operating therefore via EU delegations or EU presence. Foreign policy priorities within this group remain focused on the EU's neighborhood and Russia. The vast majority of the trade of CEE countries also takes place within the EU and in particular with Euro area countries (ECB 2013). Links with Asia therefore are the least developed. There is, however, recognition that Asia as the global growth engine is crucial for economic growth. Efforts led by Asian countries to engage with this European region are welcomed. Since 2012, China has held an annual informal 16 + 1 Summit with 11 EU Member States and 5 Balkan countries (Albania, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Bulgaria, Croatia,

the Czech Republic, Estonia, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania, Montenegro, Poland, Romania, Serbia, Slovakia, Slovenia, Macedonia). The aim of China has been to explore and intensify cooperation in three potential priority areas for economic cooperation: infrastructure, high technologies, and green technologies. CEE offers a strategic entry point into the prized EU single market for Asian countries like China especially given that labor and living costs are still relatively lower than western or northern Europe. Although the 16 + 1 Summit was regarded with much suspicion in Brussels as a Chinese enterprise at dividing the EU, it is greatly appreciated by the participating European nations. Given that national resources for engagement are limited, platforms like 16 + 1 acknowledged as a valuable platform to engage with Asian countries. ASEM therefore is greatly valued as it offers CEE nations an opportunity to interact and cooperate with a number of Asian countries. The participation of CEE countries in ASEM meetings is therefore dynamic.

Norway joined ASEM in 2012 and has been an active member of the forum. In 2014, Norway hosted the 3rd ASEM Meeting of Ministers for Education (ASEMME) Seminar on Innovative Competences and Entrepreneurship Education in the field of primary, secondary and vocational schools (ASEM 2014). Norway's priorities for relations with ASEM resonate with those of the other Nordic EU member states: trade, humanitarian and development assistance, conflict resolution, promotion of universal values (good governance, human rights, the rule of law, non-discrimination) and climate change. Norway, for instance, froze diplomatic relations with China for 6 years over a diplomatic row concerning the award of the 2010 Nobel Peace Prize to Chinese dissident Liu Xiaobo. Business interests are important. Norway holds its own Business Summit with Asia and more than 425 Norwegian companies have a presence in Asia employing almost fifty thousand people. As a member of the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), Norway is engaged in negotiating FTAs with India, Vietnam, Indonesia, Thailand and Malaysia. Norway has two added strategic considerations when it comes to relations with Asia: energy and the Arctic. Norway has large oil and gas resources, and Asia is seen as a potential market. China, the world's largest energy consumer, could be a future potential market, but it currently has major implications on Norway's energy sector. China's currency adjustment, for instance, creates ripples on global energy demand. A depreciating Chinese currency makes Chinese oil imports more expensive, affecting oil demand further which have an adverse impact on

Norway. China and Norway are also exploring collaboration for Arctic oil exploration along with Iceland. Beyond China, Norway has developed cooperation with a number of countries in areas such as energy and climate change, environment and biodiversity, clean technologies, maritime issues, geohazards, health, gender, local governance, culture, and business. Thematically energy, environment and climate change are top priorities. Given Norway's extensive diplomatic engagement in Asia, ASEM is seen as an added layer for engagement with Asia and a sophisticated link that allows Oslo to better coordinate relations with the EU and Asia.

Switzerland joined ASEM in 2012 along with Norway, and similar to Norway has extensive interests in Asia. Switzerland also shares most Nordic countries' priorities when it comes to engagement with Asia. As an ASEM member, Switzerland is involved in projects relating to human rights, sustainable development, youth, disaster risk reduction and disaster management, and vocational education and training. ASEM is seen an important instrument of Swiss foreign policy and a significant platform for dialogue with Asia and in November 2015, Switzerland co-financed the Asia-Europe Public Diplomacy Training Initiative for young diplomats. Switzerland also organized the 15th Informal ASEM Seminar on Human Rights in Montreux on the theme "Human Rights and Trafficking in Persons" in November 2015. In 2016, Switzerland sponsored the Model ASEM, a simulation of ASEM's work for students from Asia and Europe. According to Swiss Deputy Federal Department of Foreign Affairs State Secretary Georges Martin, Switzerland in ASEM aims to ensure "that ASEM remains a forum in which political questions are discussed openly and on an equal footing and solutions are developed for the benefit of all partners" (FDFA 2016).

5 Conclusion

For Europe, ASEM appends value to their already existing relationships with Asia at bilateral, supranational, and multilateral levels. The creation of ASEM serves a unique purpose: it brings together Europe and Asia exclusively as regions. This not only reinforces European engagement with Asia as a region but also the perception of Europe as a region among Europeans. While cooperation within ASEM has not been very visible or tangible as desired to render ASEM a manifestly strategic forum, ASEM has succeeded in fostering dialogue between two large, complex, and diverse regions.

The Europeans and, in particular, the EU Commission have long sought to develop a common European policy toward the Asian region.[4] However, European nations have their own individual and at the most sub-regionally shared priorities vis-à-vis Asian countries, Asia as a region and ASEM as a forum. This is partly because European nations dispose of varying levels of capacities for engagement, have diverse historical conditionings and their geographic location in particular influences their strategic calculations in terms of foreign policy. Moreover, the ability for each European ASEM member or even European members together to project their priorities onto ASEM's work agenda is circumscribed. Territorial disputes in Asia are an unsaid taboo topic at ASEM while an in-depth discussion on human rights in Asia in particular is a diplomatic blind alley. Neither does ASEM does not have the means to organize security cooperation at an interregional level, provided both regions agree on specific security issues to work on together. Economic cooperation is the most desirable but as other chapters in the book have discussed, there is much scope to intensify and expand economic cooperation within ASEM. ASEM's work priorities are therefore determined largely by what Asia is interested in engaging on. This includes more practical areas for cooperation: connectivity, trade, SMEs, technology, youth and education, skills development, disaster management, clean energy and resource management, and so on.

As ASEM enters its third decade, Europe is a weaker region with much greater internal and foreign policy challenges than have transpired during ASEM's two decade history. European engagement within ASEM while important may tend to be limited. However, ASEM's dynamic theme for its next decade "partnership for the future through connectivity," offers hope for a brighter, prosperous, more dynamic European future through enhanced ties with Asia.

Notes

1. With the United States of America (USA), Canada, Mexico, Brazil, South Africa, Russia, India, China, Japan, and South Korea.
2. For instance, Operation Flood in India, a project of the Indian National Dairy Development Board (NDDB) was the world's biggest dairy development program which made India, a milk-deficient nation, the largest milk producer in the world, surpassing the USA in 1998 with about 17% of global output in 2010–2011. Phase I (1970–1980) was financed by

the sale of skimmed milk powder and butter oil donated by the European Union (then the European Economic Community) through the World Food Programme.

3. For a detailed discussion on trade, see Chap. 2.
4. The 2001 Strategy "Europe and Asia" identified six objectives for EU-Asia cooperation, including strengthened peace and security, increase in mutual trade and investment flows, enhanced development cooperation, protection of human rights, spread of democracy and good governance as well as actions raising mutual awareness. See European Commission 2001.

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CHAPTER 11

ASEM: An Asian Perspective

Roopmati Khandekar

1 Introduction

Spanning an existence of two decades and boasting of membership across Eurasia today, the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) is undoubtedly a vital forum for interregional cooperation between 51 countries (Asian and European), the ASEAN Secretariat and the EU. ASEM is a relatively new form of interaction between regions, which should be termed transregional rather than interregional cooperation. This is because the two regions do not come together as two cohesive regional political actors but rather as regional groupings comprised of individual members with their individual agendas and individual voices (Yeo 2000, pp. 113–144). They bring their perceptions, expectations, and actions to the forum, as is the case with all international organizations. The impact of perceptions in particular, as well as expectations and actions in the forum is far more pronounced in ASEM, however, than in other international organizations. Theoretically, ASEM is one of the strongest regional cooperation bridges in the international system. In essence, however, significant differences in perception between European and Asian partners and among Asians themselves, along with the poor implementation of dialogue

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outcomes and an un-institutionalized framework, make it much weaker than other such platforms.

This chapter seeks to geographically explore Asian nations' perspectives vis-à-vis ASEM and in interactions with their European counterparts. The chapter first builds on the more general perceptions Asian countries harbor vis-à-vis Europeans and the EU in particular, to help develop a better understanding of Asian perceptions of ASEM itself.

Asians in general appreciate the existence of ASEM as a dedicated platform for interaction with the EU (in particular)—the world's largest economy, and a consistently top trading and development partner for a number of Asian countries. Surprisingly, in spite of the plethora of regional fora in and involving Asia, ASEM is also the only venue where all Asian leaders meet in the broad constellation that they do, apart from the UN. For ASEM's Asian members, the forum is a way of periodically reassuring Europe of their commitment to engagement with the old continent. It also allows for Asian leaders to meet among themselves in the sidelines of summits. This has at times proved strategically important for certain nations to iron out differences or break the ice after a breakdown of communications, like India and Pakistan for instance.

However, the overall conclusion reached by this chapter is that the strategic importance of ASEM as an operational forum through the Asian perspective remains significantly limited. While ASEM's Asian members may value the albeit limited economic and development opportunities offered by ASEM, they are not very convinced by the platform's political role. The investment of political resources and priority toward ASEM by its Asian members continues to have a large scope for development. This chapter seeks to establish whether ASEM as a forum is clearly underutilized by Asian nations or if ASEM is a deficient forum itself. The growing interdependence and interaction of the two regions—Asia and Europe—nonetheless beckon the development of ASEM into a more robust forum of "interaction and action."

2 Asian Perceptions of Europe

Europe-Asia relations span centuries. However, over the last century, Asian perceptions of Europe have ranged from oppression (stemming from colonialism), to suspicion (colonial past + Cold War), to chagrin (donor–recipient relations), opportunity (onset of the Asian century) and rebellion (the need to have a greater say in world affairs). The onset

of the twenty-first century has brought a greater degree of interdependency and sense of equality in Europe-Asia relations assuaging to a certain extent but not erasing completely the lack of trust and suspicions. Relations between Asia and Europe have been marked profoundly and continue to be influenced to a certain degree even today by Europe's colonial past in Asia. European colonies spanned across the Asian continent with the exception of Japan,[1] Thailand, Mongolia, Nepal, Bhutan, Afghanistan and China (although much of China was divided into various spheres of European influence).[2] Even though the atrocities of European colonialism are not discussed much across Europe, they are instilled strongly in the contemporary Asians ethos. Following the end of the world wars, even as the Europeans together with the USA began to construct a global system beginning with the establishment of the United Nations Organization (UN) in 1945, a third of the world's population lived under colonial rule. Most Asians felt left out of the process. Impoverished by colonialism and dependent on aid on the same European countries, a number of Asian nations remained silent spectators in global politics which were heavily dominated by the USA and Europe.

As the colonial era began to die out, European influence in Asia did not cease. The Cold War saw a renewed, violent presence of Europeans in Asia. Since then, most Asian countries have viewed European countries and in particular great European powers with suspicion. One of the most famous outcomes of the Cold War has been the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), conceived mainly by the first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, which began as a rejection to align with or against the Western or Eastern blocs. One of the most important tenets of NAM has been the principle of non-interference in the sovereign matters of a state. Europe-Asia relations have also been largely characterized by a donor–recipient relationship. During the Cold War and for sometime after, Europeans, and in particular former colonial powers, granted development aid to Asian countries. This put Europeans in a position of power vis-à-vis their Asian partners, in particular through various conditions that were attached to development aid. Although these conditionalities aimed for better governance in the aid-recipient nations, they gave rise to the perception among Asians that Europeans held a "moral high ground." Various human rights dialogues, which were established between the EU and/or European countries with their Asian partners, further reinforced this notion—these dialogues continue to exist today.

The same conditionalities were employed by international financial institutions run principally by the Europeans like the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, further deteriorating the image of Europe in Asia.

However, as Asian countries began to recover economically from their colonial past, the dynamics of Asia-Europe relations began to change. With the appearance of the phrase "The Asian Century" (US Congress 1985), Asia slowly began to be seen as an opportunity. The economic rise of China in the 80s (Zhu 2012) followed by India in the late 90s seemed to confirm the rumor that the next century would be dominated by Asia and led by the two Asian giants China and India. Relations between Europe and Asia shifted from a development-oriented partnership to include more focus on economics and political cooperation. Throughout this period, Asian countries began to stress on an "equal partnership" with European countries. The proliferation of the notion of equal partnership in Europe-Asia relations has been reinforced and in turn accelerated by the demands of Asian countries, in particular, China and India, to have a greater say in global affairs. It has been further accentuated by the perceived relative decline of Europe following the 2008 global financial and European debt crisis. Today, Europe-Asia relations are strongly underpinned by economic relations. Only a few countries still accept development aid from Europe. Of those that do, the majority have more important commercial ties with Europe than the development aid they receive. With their strong economic growth rates, Asians now feel a newfound confidence when dealing with Europe. The confidence has abated their suspicions vis-à-vis Europe to a large degree, but recent crises in Europe (continued economic slump, Greek debt crisis, unstable relations with its neighborhood and in particular Russia, migration crisis), have caused a loss of confidence in Europe as a global actor.

It is essential to consider the panoply of emotions that govern Asia's relations with Europe and as an extension, ASEM. Throughout the chapter, elements of this background will be referred to while explaining various Asian ASEM member countries' perceptions a propos de ASEM. Additionally, it is necessary to note that while Asian countries have been well familiar with European nations, most of them continue to face difficulties in fully comprehending the European Union—its functions, distinction from its member states, its various institutions and actors and so on.

3 ASEM for Asia

ASEM today spans vaguely across the Eurasian continent and encompasses nations that have varied perceptions of the concept of an Asia-Europe Meeting. Not being a structured organization but rather a compilation of summits and meetings, the priority that the Asian nations allot to the same remains varied. Asians are used to fora that underscore dialogue and lack a binding institutional structure. The vast majority of regional fora in Asia cater to this preference where dialogue is the goal. However, close observation of the main regional fora in Asia reveals that the dialogue has a direction and is pointed toward a concrete outcome(s). For the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), it is to build peace in the South China Sea, foster confidence building and preventive diplomacy and includes various regular military and security exercises. The ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus[3] too focuses on practical cooperation among the defense establishments of the partner countries. Established in 1989, APEC has since its inception aimed to create a free trade area of the Asia Pacific. APEC has since aimed to foster the creation of the Transpacific Partnership (TPP), a regional mega free trade agreement.[4]

With an aim to enhance Europe-Asia relations, ASEM therefore remains comparatively vague and directionless. Dialogue is overwhelming the key deliverable of ASEM without any concrete goal or significant practical cooperation initiatives. The ASEM agenda is open and flexible to include or exclude topics. The most appealing aspect of ASEM remains the various bilateral gatherings and discussions that take place between Asians and Europeans and among Asian leaders in the margins of ASEM summits and gatherings. These political interactions do not limit the topics to be discussed and bring informality to ASEM.

At its inception, however, the economic factor was undeniably the dominating concern for both Europe and Asia. Following the formation of APEC[5] in which Europe was denied observer status, the EU felt deprived of a stake in the Asian economic boom. ASEM therefore granted the EU a comparable platform with Asia as the USA had through APEC. ASEM not only provided Europe with an opportunity to venture into Asian matters, but was also seen as a lever to keep the Americans committed to a multilateral approach in their foreign economic policy (Bridges 1999, pp. 181–183; Rüland 1996, pp. 133–138; Yeo 2000, pp. 114–117). For Asia, ASEM's focus on

economic cooperation was the biggest pull factor given that Europe was the largest trade partner then of almost all Asian countries. In the beginning, a number of successful initiatives focusing on economic cooperation were launched under the aegis of ASEM. These included a dialogue on WTO issues, the implementation of a Trade Facilitation Action Plan (TFAP) to reduce and eliminate non-tariff barriers to trade, as well as through the implementation of an Investment Promotion Action Plan (IPAP) to promote two-way investment flows between Europe and Asia. Particularly appreciated by ASEM's Asian partners was the London 1998 summit, which issued two major initiatives in response to the Asian Financial Crisis. Economic affairs continue to be a predominant theme for the discussion according to Asian perspectives of ASEM, though it must be noted that the Economic Ministers have not gathered since 2004 (see Chap. 3 for more on economic cooperation within ASEM).

In the contemporary international interconnected economic system, the richness of ASEM interactions is evidenced by the breadth of issues taken up by economics and financial ministers, senior officials, and experts. A dedicated Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) further engages the business community. Global instability and irregularities tend to be the main tenets of discussions mainly due to the global presence that ASEM nations command.[6] In 2008, at the 7th ASEM Summit in China a discussion focused on the response to the international financial crisis. This was a boost to the participation of Asian nations in the mitigation of global irregularities. In the 2010 ASEM summit, the reform of the international financial and regulatory architecture was discussed. The issues related to international financial reforms would remain a key topic for future discussions, and is likely to be included at the anniversary summit to be held in Mongolia in July 2016. However, economic cooperation has in recent years has been paltry. The TFAP and IPAP are outdated and need to cogitate new developments in regional and ASEM members' economic situation to then convert into concrete actions for ASEM. There has been no clear evidence of Asia-Europe cooperation within ASEM having any positive impact on WTO matters either. Furthermore, while ASEM had managed to foster Asia-Europe cooperation during the Asian financial crisis, most Asian nations felt slighted by the fact that the EU did not seek lessons from their experience during the Asian financial crisis to apply during the European financial and debt crisis. The geoeconomic realities in Asia today render economic cooperation within ASEM further impotent. The proliferation

of bilateral and mega plurilateral free trade agreements in Asia have far outpaced the economic opportunities that are for offer by Europe within ASEM.

ASEM's political pillar remains a secondary concern to economic cooperation. Political cooperation in ASEM tends to focus largely on security matters. Asian countries, however, do not see Europe and the EU in particular as a global security actor, more so as concerns security issues in the Asia. Countries in the Asian region, a large number of which are members of the NAM, believe strictly in the principle of non-interference in the sovereign matters of states. China, for instance, has repeatedly opposed the internationalization of the South China Sea dispute and hence its addition in the ASEM agenda. Similarly, India opposes any reference to the Kashmir dispute it shares with Pakistan. This reservation harks back to the colonial past of various European ASEM members. Asians continue to remain suspicious vis-à-vis Europe. Western actions leading to forced regime change in Iraq and the abandonment of Afghanistan have resuscitated these misgivings ever stronger. Most Asians equate Europe and even the EU to the military organization North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a collective defense organization. The vast majority of European ASEM members are members of NATO. The distinction therefore that the EU or Europe is distinct from NATO fails to convince most Asian partners. All the more, Europe has lacked a concrete security strategy for cooperation with Asian actors on Asian security issues. For many years, Europe was convinced that the best way to resolve insecurity in Asia was to export its own model of regional integration. Although European officials seem to have relinquished this notion of late, there has been no evidence of a sound replacement strategy. In today's context given the plethora of security and existential concerns that Europe and the EU face, security cooperation has fallen further down the priority scale, especially as Asian actors are less interested in resolving Europe's security concerns than Europe has been in Asian matters.

Overall, cultural cooperation within ASEM ranks lowest on priority among Asian members. Nonetheless, the work done by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF),[7] funded by contributions from various ASEM members, has been highly commendable and fostered interaction among the broader sections of Asian and European societies. ASEF has contributed significantly to dialogue and cooperation (see Chap. 5) as a key instrument for ASEM's outreach to civil society, academia, and the

people-to-people interactions. Seminars and conferences on socioculturally relevant topics as diverse as the future of electronic media, labor relations, child welfare, traditional and modern medicine and the like are attended by specialists in the fields. Additionally, there have been business school and university exchange programmers and think tank interactions across both regions.

The above-mentioned compartmentalization of Asian priorities vis-à-vis ASEM and its three pillars sheds light on the nature of interactions of the European and Asian regions as well as the direction of their efforts to foster deepening of relations. ASEM's potential thus is slated to being a forum for an informal exchange of views, helping to strengthen economic cooperation, mutual awareness and if possible cooperation on political and security issues as well as social issues in a broader intellectual and cultural context.[8]

4 Specific Perspectives of ASEM's Asian Member States

Asian nations have historically been culturally vibrant but relatively introverted nations who have concentrated on nation building activities coupled with regional alliances. ASEM, a forum for collaboration of two regions that have shared an uneven colonial history and compete for economic development in the contemporary era, lays the basis for an Asian-European partnership that can lead to the enhancement of common interests and the adoption of common positions. Asian nations have mainly a twin-pronged interest in the ASEM process—economic and political. Areas of conflict include the inability of Asia and Europe to agree on issues such as the relative importance of political and security dialogue within ASEM process and the liberalization of trade and investment, according to Shen Guoliang, Senior Research Fellow at the China Institute for International Strategic Studies (Stokhof et al. 2004). Beyond that, they have mainly collaborated within ASEM to stress the Asian identity and indulge among themselves in posturing as well as regional community-building interactions. Some Asian nations have also followed their rivals into membership of ASEM, including India and Pakistan, Japan and China and the like which can be said to pursue ASEM as a policy of strategically counterbalancing themselves because their rival has joined ASEM.

However, one of the key objectives of the ASEM process is to deepen cooperation between member countries located in two very different regions. It is therefore necessary to elaborate on some of the perspectives on the Asian side vis-à-vis ASEM as a forum to elucidate their approach to the process. For the purpose of analysis in this chapter, the Asian side of ASEM is divided into the geographical regions of Central Asia, South Asia, North East Asia, South East Asia and Australia-New Zealand.[9]

4.1 Central Asia

Kazakhstan was the first and thus far only Central Asian nation to be initiated into ASEM in 2014. Kazakhstan's accession to ASEM changes the identity of ASEM from Asia-Europe to Eurasian and stands to bring onto the ASEM agenda Central Asia-specific issues—energy security, border management, transport and transit infrastructure, the Chinese connectivity initiative One Belt One Road (OBOR) which will provide Europe with the shortest route to Asia, and similar. Moreover, it opens the door to ASEM membership for the other Central Asian Republics. The EU and Kazakhstan already have a well-developed partnership, especially region-to-region. Kazakhstan's membership of ASEM signals Almaty's intention to potentially unite parts of Europe and Asia. The strategic incentive for ASEM membership for Kazakhstan though has been the expansion of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to include India and Pakistan—all members of ASEM in addition to Russia and China. With the OBOR initiative underway, in which Kazakhstan is an important transit nation, ASEM provides a crucial platform to discuss Asia-Europe connectivity.

4.2 South Asia

India's membership of ASEM has had three key motivations. First, its engagement with ASEM is arguably an extension of India's "Look East" foreign policy. India was keen to broaden its foreign policy engagement with its East Asian neighbors through ASEM which was established as a forum between East Asian countries (ASEAN members, China, Japan South Korea) and Europe East Asia has been a priority region for India ever since its Look East policy was established in 1991, marking a strategic shift in Indian foreign policy. India's enthusiasm to strengthen ties with its East Asian neighbors will undoubtedly add to its efforts to

strengthen the Asian unit in ASEM. Second, India has always valued Europe as a partner—its largest trade partner—and sought engagement with it through membership of ASEM to further enhance bilateral cooperation as well as to balance its engagement with the USA. Third, for a long time, Indian foreign policy was circumscribed. However, with its growing status of an economic powerhouse, since the 2000s, India began seeking a larger global profile commensurate with its economic rise. Membership of ASEM therefore provided India with an opportunity to enhance its international engagement.

India's first Summit-level participation was at the 7th Summit held in Beijing on 24–25 October 2008, where former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh led the Indian delegation. It marked the beginning of a new orientation for future ASEM meetings, as members agreed that the dynamism of ASEM should find expression in tangible result-oriented initiatives, which could be utilized to define joint responses by Asia and Europe to global and regional challenges and also seize opportunities for growth and development. Twelve areas were identified in ASEM FMM11 for tangible cooperation. For each area, multiple countries have expressed interest in enhancing cooperation. With the addition of 4 more areas, including 'Technologies for Diagnostics' proposed by India in the 10th ASEM Summit, the list got 16 areas for Tangible Cooperation among ASEM members (ASEM 2014). Following the FMM12 in Luxembourg, the list has been expanded to include 19 areas. ASEM provides India and China in particular yet another platform to cooperate and engage in dialogue without direct confrontation. From time to time, India has also benefited from the forum to iron out differences of monumental strategic concern with Pakistan. For instance, when bilateral diplomatic communication between both nations collapsed over the issue of ceasefire violations along the Line of Control (LoC) Indian External Affairs Minister Salman Khurshid held a bilateral meeting with his Pakistani counterpart on the margins of the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting on 11–12 November 2013 (*Economic Times* 2013).

Pakistan joined ASEM in 2008, the same year as India. While following India into the forum has been the confirmation of a trend in Pakistan's foreign policy and a major factor for Pakistan's membership, engagement with Europe and other Asian neighbors has been a strong influence. Europe is a vital region for Pakistan. Islamabad continues to rely heavily on development aid from the EU and its member states. Europe is also one of the most important trading partners for the

country given its poor trade relations with India due to political differences. For Pakistan, the economic benefits of membership of ASEM bear similar weight as the strategic considerations. Pakistan also endorses ASEM endeavors to strengthen connections between Asia and Europe in the fields of education, science and technology, trade, business, security, culture and infrastructure sectors as well as people-to-people contacts.[10]

Bangladesh joined ASEM on the occasion of the ninth summit in 2012 and has committed itself to ASEM interactions. For Bangladesh, ASEM provided Dhaka to interact with developed European economies and its Asian neighbors on an equal footing. According to Sheikh Hasina, Prime Minister of Bangladesh, induction of Bangladesh into ASEM, greatly "enhanced the country's position and dignity further as most of its members represent the developed world" (The Observer Daily 2014). According to her, the reason why Bangladesh was included was also due to the growth of its economy. Bangladesh seeks to therefore primarily benefit from trade and technical cooperation (specifically focused on connectivity). Given the severe vulnerability of the country to climate change, ASEM also serves as an effective platform for Dhaka to raise awareness of the country's challenges and existential threats from climate change.

4.3 Northeast Asia

The three main Northeast Asian participants (the People's Republic of China, Japan, and the Republic of Korea) initially accepted ASEM as a forum to interact on a platform for government-guided economic regionalism and closer monetary cooperation (Olds et al. 1999, pp. 101–106), which culminated for example in the ASEAN + 3 initiatives (Bardacke 1999). Today, all three countries see it as a tool for comprehensive region building and region-to-region interaction on a wide range of areas including politics, economy, culture, and society.

In 2008, *Mongolia* became the fourth East Asian country to join ASEM. Ulaanbaatar sees itself as a historical and geographical bridge between Europe and Asia and has therefore underscored greater connectivity in ASEM thus emphasizing its vision of ASEM as being both politically and economically converged (Saikhanbileg 2015). In 2016, the 11th ASEM Summit of Heads of State and Government (ASEM11) was hosted in Ulaanbaatar, by Mongolia. Celebrating a quarter of a century of democracy, Mongolia has begun the reassessment of its foreign

policy and economic development and hosting 11th ASEM summit was seen as a part of greater international activism (Campi 2015). According to President Tsahiagiin Elbegdorj, Mongolia as a young democracy was highly eager to host the ASEM summit with 53 participants.

China is one of Europe's biggest trading partners and has been involved since the establishment of ASEM in 1996. One of the primary objectives in forming ASEM was the deepening of Chinese engagement with the international system. But although Beijing agreed to participate in the first ASEM Summit in Bangkok in 1996, Chinese input was initially low. In contrast, there has been a noticeable change in China's dealings with ASEM in the last few years. It was declared at ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in (2002), that China was further increasing its input into ASEM by acting as a co-sponsor in all "key ASEM initiatives" for the ASEM Summit in Copenhagen (ASEM 2002, paragraphs 6 and 7 [Bersick 2002]). China expects positive cooperation in the areas of ASEM with European partners on an equal footing (largely due to its colonial history but also to further recognition of its emergence). According to the Chinese government, the value of ASEM is to "deepen exchange and cooperation, promote equality, mutual trust and practical cooperation between Asia and Europe, and enhance the role and influence of ASEM in upholding world peace and regional stability, promoting world economic recovery and sustainable development and working for solutions to global issues".

For China, not only can ASEM further a process of multipolarization, thereby helping to establish a new political and economic world order but also counterbalance the influence of the United States of America in the region. Beijing sees the importance of the ASEM process mainly in its role as a mechanism allowing for interregional cooperation with the Europeans, and engagement with its Asian partners, all without the participation of the USA. ASEM allows the Chinese government a politico-strategic balancing dimension. Over the years, however, China has also seen the platform as a vital platform to promote economic cooperation. Europe and Asia are China's largest trading partner regions. While China is involved in regional trade integration in Asia (principally via RCEP), it would serve Chinese interests greatly were a large economic bloc created between the already integrated European market and Asia. Facilitating this vision is the Chinese initiative of the One Belt and One Road—consisting of two main components, the land-based "Silk Road Economic Belt" (SREB) and oceangoing "Maritime Silk Road"

(MSR)—which seeks to connect Asia and Europe. China prefers ASEM to be a forum to discuss economic issues rather than sensitive strategic flashpoints. The Chinese side has therefore refused to include any sensitive issue like the South China Sea issue in ASEM agenda.

Japan has focused its relations with ASEM through the lens of regional interaction.[11] Japan has played an important role in region building in Asia and has strongly supported the need to develop a robust regional security forum to address the Asia's myriad security crises. For Japan, a more integrated region is a stronger, more secure region, only benefitting further from greater interaction with Europe through ASEM. As a country sharing many occidental values, Japan has at times seen its role as a contributor to open regionalism and in coordinating interaction between Asia and Europe (MOFA Japan 2012).[12] In view of ASEM's three pillars (political, economic, and cultural), the Japanese perspectives can be analyzed as follows. First, Japan underscores the political aspect of ASEM, even endorsing the representation of ASEM at the global forums like the United Nations. Japan has also hoped that Asian security matters like terrorism, maritime concerns like freedom of navigation and territorial disputes such as the South and East China Sea disputes are brought to the agenda. However, Chinese rejection has so far prevented the latter from being discussed on the ASEM platform. Second, Japan does not expect extensive economic interactions under the ASEM but has valued the platform's role in tackling economic and financial crises as well as sustainable development. Third, in terms of cultural cooperation, Japan appreciates the cultural exchanges and influences under ASEM, which seeks to promote dialogue and cooperation among ASEM's highly diverse members (Bersick 2002). All in all, it can be said that Japan has been selective in its initiatives for ASEM.

South Korea's awareness of the EU was increased by negotiations of the Korea Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO) in 1994 when Korean diplomats actively sought a stronger relationship with the EU. When the Korean government negotiated to conclude a framework agreement with the EU in 1995, it soon agreed to attach a political declaration, which entered into force much earlier than the other aspects of the agreement itself. This agreement initialed shortly before the ASEM I was announced in Bangkok during the first summit. Through ASEM, South Korea was able to strengthen its political and diplomatic engagement with the EU and to diversify its choice of foreign policy partners, beyond the USA and Japan, in relation to the Korean

peninsula (MOFA ROK). South Korea lobbied to host ASEM III. In the case of South Korea, its basic objectives within ASEM initially were two layered: development of a mechanism for intensifying the cooperation between South Korea, Japan and China, in other words a North East Asian solidity (against ASEAN) strengthened further due to engagement with a third partner, in this case the EU, and to deal with the rivalry between Japan and China (Lee 1998). As the South Korean economy has grown and transformed, so have its expectations from ASEM. At the commencement of ASEM, South Korea sought to benefit from greater development cooperation and economic relations with its partners. ASEM II was an important summit for South Korea, which desperately sought investment in its economy during the Asian financial crisis. The South Korean government hailed "ASEM II as its first successful exercise in 'business diplomacy'" (MOFA ROK), and even received $4984,800 via the ASEM Trust Fund (ASEM 1998). Subsequent ASEM summits have addressed peace and security issues on the Korean Peninsula, which remains South Korea's top political priority. In recent years, priorities for South Korea have included international trade (given South Korea voracious pursuit of free trade agreements (FTAs) with international partners following its FTA roadmap in 2003), development cooperation (South Korea has transformed into an aid donor), nuclear security, science and technology cooperation, and democracy and human rights. South Korea's priority and engagement remain wide and diverse vis-à-vis ASEM given its emergence as a global middle power.

The ASEM process is undoubtedly pressurized by the highly stressful relationship between the two neighbors—Japan and China—wherein there is an underlying expectation to resolve or ease the tensions. The strategic vitality of ASEM is as mentioned earlier, extremely low. Nonetheless, the ASEM process will come under increasing pressure as China continues to use ASEM as a mechanism to promote its economic interests in the Eurasian region while Japan endeavors to seek political mitigation.

4.4 Southeast Asia

All ten members of ASEAN and the ASEAN secretariat are members of ASEM. ASEM is the brainchild of Singapore and France who in November 1994 proposed the creation of an EU-Asia summit meeting to help develop a new partnership between the two regions. At the

creation of ASEM in 1996, seven ASEAN members (excluding Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar) became members of ASEM.[13] The first summit was hosted by Thailand in March 1996, in essence launching ASEM. With the expansion of ASEAN, its newest members Laos, Cambodia, and Myanmar officially joined the ASEM process, although not without difficulty.

ASEAN today finds itself at the center of Asia's regional fora and commerce. Taken as a whole, ASEAN with a 625 million strong population is the world's seventh largest economy. ASEAN has grown into its role as the arguable epicenter of Asia. Its embodiment of the "ASEAN Way" of consultation, non-interference and consensus, of international relations and global crisis management has donned it the role of a regional diplomat in a continent where nearly each country has conflicting relations with its neighbor, As ASEAN's role and integration process have grown, so have its global ambitions. ASEAN members play to the notion of strength in unity and therefore engage with global actors as much as a group as they do individually. For ASEAN, Europe is a significant region and the EU is a natural partner. The EU is not only one of ASEAN's top trading and development partners (ASEAN receives nearly half of EU aid flows to Asia), but has also nurtured ASEAN's regional integration process. ASEM has therefore been a key priority for ASEAN and ASEAN countries are one of the most enthusiastic members of the intergovernmental platform. For ASEAN, ASEM is a platform for political dialogue, economic cooperation and cultural and social exchanges with not only Europe but also its Asian partners.

Unlike other Asian actors described above, ASEAN as a group attaches equal priorities to all pillars of ASEM. Politically, ASEAN finds itself at the center of a number of regional security challenges ranging from territorial disputes in the South China Sea, trafficking (humans, drugs, arms), maritime security, climate change, and so on. Economically, ASEM provides ASEAN to engage with its two largest trading partner regions and portray itself as a destination for greater investment and trade. Sociocultural cooperation has been a priority for ASEAN as a regional organization itself and therefore finds natural synergy with ASEM's third pillar.

Together with France, *Singapore* took the initiative for the ASEM process in Asia, launching it as an "Asia Europe Summit'. Singapore's objectives in ASEM process were outlined in the "Asian Discussion Paper" of December 1995, drafted by Singaporean diplomats. The paper

emphasized the building of a forum that enables Asian and European participants to cooperate on an interregional level. Because East Asia and North America are linked through the APEC process, "the first and most fundamental purpose of the Asia-Europe Meeting is to bridge this missing link" (Hofmeister and Yeo 2010). Though Singapore's main agenda is the economic realm, it has emphasized that for ASEM to succeed in the long term, it needs to embrace a multifaceted and broad-based interaction encompassing political, economic, cultural, educational, and other areas. Singapore underscores the basis of equality and mutual respect to strengthen political dialogue between the Asian and European region. Singapore stresses ASEM as an opportunity for Asia and Europe to cooperate with each other on the international forum, to enable a united front and cooperation in other international platforms like UN, WTO, IMF and the like to enhance global peace and stability (MOFA Singapore 2000).

Thailand has been an active Asian member in the conceptualization of ASEM. In 1996, the first ASEM summit took place in Bangkok, the Thai capital. Thailand perceives ASEM in light of Asian security needs. Thailand's policies and priorities are connected with the shared interests of both regions. Given growing European trade and investment in the Asian region and vice versa, the EU has an interest in ensuring the peaceful rise of China, and the security of the South China Sea, the Strait of Taiwan and the Korean Peninsula (Singh 1996, p. 23). Thailand seeks to play an active and constructive partner to both Asian and European nations (MOFA Thailand 2012). Similar to Singapore, Thailand believes in a cooperative front on international forums. Beyond interregional collaboration, Thailand's priorities lie in sustainable development, connectivity, and economic growth (MOFA Thailand 2012).

Malaysia values its membership of ASEM as an opportunity to interact actively on a multilateral global forum toward global political and socioeconomic stability and security (MOFA Malaysia). In particular, the economic perspective of ASEM appeals to Malaysia.

Indonesia is arguably the shepherd nation of ASEAN and plays a leading role in the regional organizations internal as well as external dealings. As a member of the G20 and a global middle power, Jakarta is keen to engage actively in international affairs. Given Indonesia's colonial past, the country is also keen on the value ASEM serves to engage with Europe on an equal footing. Moreover, it strives to strengthen its position among its Asian neighbors (MOFA Indonesia). Indonesia's

perceives ASEM as a "bridge" built to lessen the gap between the two regions and its membership symphonizes well with Jakarta's global ambitions. ASEM is therefore one of the mediums for Indonesia to strengthen its position among Asian countries and cooperate with Europe (UE). As the next generation of emerging economies, the economic cooperation apparatus provided by the ASEM garners Indonesia's attention. In order to support this, Asia-Europe Business Forum (AEBF) was set up with members of business practitioners from ASEM countries. Between AEBF and the official ASEM forum a dialogue is facilitated with hopes that harmony is achieved between the policymakers and business practitioners (MOFA Indonesia). As an Islamic nation, Indonesia has also found merit in using the cultural cooperation pillar of ASEM to enhance human rights and greater understanding about the diverse cultures within ASEM membership, through programs like interfaith dialogues, human rights seminars, networking and student exchanges among others. However, going forward, Indonesia would much like for ASEM to produce more concrete (action oriented) cooperation that is based on equality and mutual benefits in particular in the economic sphere of trade, investment, and support to SMEs (MOFA Indonesia). In 2007, Indonesia held the Development Dialogue Forum Indonesian SMEs in regard to ASEM in Banten.

Vietnam views ASEM to be capable of creating new driving forces and orientations for common awareness and coordination in policies and toward the common goal of building a new Asia-Europe partnership, deepening the understanding between the two regions' people and establishing strong dialogues among equal partners (MOFA Vietnam). As a developing country, Hanoi perceives cooperation in economics and trade and investment, sustainable development, as well as in finance and science and technology as a priority of the ASEM process (MOFA Vietnam).

For *the Philippines*, a developing country facing a host of security challenges ranging from climate change to the South China Sea dispute with China to trafficking and others, ASEM provides an important platform to debate issues that Manila can air to its partners. ASEM also provides the Philippines, a former European colony, to interact with important global partners on an equal footing. Given the fact that tourism is an important industry for the Philippines, the cultural cooperation aspect of ASEM also provides an added benefit. Manila therefore attaches much importance to the commendable role that ASEF plays in the ASEM, to

advance the collaboration between Asia and Europe through cultural, intellectual, and people-to-people exchanges (Domingo-Albert 2010).

Brunei Darussalam values ASEM as it is a unique process to foster common understanding and dialogue between Asia and Europe, and creates opportunities for exchanging experiences and share knowledge. It supports the importance of achieving result-oriented tangible outcomes of cooperation among ASEM members as agreed by Leaders at the 10th ASEM Summit in (2014). In this regard, Brunei Darussalam is particularly keen to enhance ASEM cooperation in 4 areas namely SME cooperation, Renewable Energy, Energy Efficiency Technologies, and Higher Education. Thus far, Brunei Darussalam has initiated projects on biodiversity and entrepreneurship development with the support of other ASEM partners (MOFA Brunei Darussalam). Furthermore, the Secretariat of the regional organization is a participant in ASEM since 2008. The individual membership of ASEAN underlines the vitality of the South East Asian region in ASEM and the importance of regional integration. The membership of the ASEAN secretariat has reinforced potential areas of common interests for practical cooperation and collaboration, namely sustainable development, environment, public health, education, human resource development, and culture. The ASEAN platform also assisted the ASEM to deal with then-controversial matters like membership of Myanmar to ASEM[14] for instance.

Laos and *Cambodia*'s interests in ASEM are similar and echo the interests of some of their fellow developing nations within ASEM: sustainable development, commerce, and equal footing. Addressing the opening ceremony, Choummaly Sayasone stressed that ASEM 9 is an important event not only for ASEM cooperation but also for consolidating the trend of dialogue, cooperation and connectivity in the two continents … especially in the context of rapid and complicated development (Toitrenews 2012). As least developed countries, and thus beneficiaries of the EU's "Everything But Arms" initiative under which all their exports to the EU except arms are duty and quota free, ASEM is an important platform for Vientiane and Hanoi for engagement with the EU in addition to bilateral and EU-ASEAN interregional engagement. It is additionally vital because it also includes Asian partners some of whom are as important to Laos and Cambodia as the EU. Moreover, both countries face a number of transnational challenges in particular water management issues for which they cooperate with their Asian and

European partners. ASEM thus helps to consolidate cooperation and exchange notes.

Myanmar's (formerly Burma) membership of ASEM has been both controversial and dynamic to say the least and has vividly exposed the contrast in viewpoints between Asian and European perspectives, values and foreign policy machinations. Myanmar has affected not only EU-ASEAN region-to-region relations but also Asia-Europe relations at the ASEM level. The EU had strongly opposed Myanmar's entry into ASEAN in 1997 (Liddell 2001). When ASEAN admitted Myanmar nonetheless, the EU stalled dialogue with ASEAN and suspended ministerial level meetings during the next 3 years. The EC-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC) too did not convene for the following 2 years (Liddell 2001). In 2000, while the EU finally agreed to hold a Ministerial meeting with ASEAN, including Myanmar, participation from the EU's side remained paltry. As a result, EU-ASEAN relations remained sluggish. Negotiations on an EU-ASEAN free trade agreement, which began in 2007, were suspended in 2009, for which Myanmar was a key reason. Even though EU efforts produced little change within Myanmar, it did manage to succeed in having Myanmar renounce its claim to ASEAN presidency.

When Myanmar joined ASEAN in 1997, the EU made it clear that Myanmar, which was then under authoritarian military dictatorship and faced EU sanctions for human rights abuses, would not automatically accede to ASEM (Gaens 2008). Myanmar's ASEAN partners especially Malaysia and other Asian partners then stood by Myanmar citing that Myanmar's internal matters were its sovereign prerogative and that an approach of constructive engagement should be followed instead of political ostracism. The vast majority of Asian ASEM members has for years strongly opposed the concept of sanctions and conditionality and continues to do so. Some have made it clear that they do not recognize unilateral sanctions like those issued by the EU or the USA unless they ensue from the UN.

It is hard to say what Myanmar sought from ASEM initially, since its membership to ASEM was more about engagement with its Asian neighbors than about the platform itself. However, since the country's political turn-around through democratic reforms beginning in 2010, the country's main priorities have become international political engagement (especially with Europe which is today an important development partner to Naypyidaw), economic relations (trade and investment),

modernization and connectivity. Although Myanmar's challenges remain (persecution of the Rohingya Muslim minorities, Rakhine state violence, child soldiers, human trafficking, and so on), the country today enjoys a more comfortable relationship with its European and Asian partners in ASEM. Myanmar will host the thirteenth ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2017 (MOFA Myanmar 2015).

4.5 Australasia

In recent years both *Australia* and *New Zealand* have grown to assume Asian identities. Both countries have strong occidental cultures and ethnic populations akin to Europe and the USA/Canada, setting them apart from their Asian neighbors despite the geographic proximity. This change has been spurred by their growing economic integration in Asia and deep awareness of their shared challenges. Australia and New Zealand, which have long supported a potent regional engagement infrastructure in Asia, lobbied hard to be involved in ASEM. Facilitated by the enlargement of the European ASEM group and the decade-long lobbying of national leaders, Australia joined ASEM in 2010 despite opposition from Malaysia and East Asian nations (Maier-Knapp 2014). "The global and macroeconomic impact of ASEM was the main motivation behind Australia's third attempt to gain ASEM membership" (Maier-Knapp 2014). Given the non-binding nature of discussions at ASEM, a process that has generally appealed to Asian countries and allowed them to be more candid, appealed to both Australia and New Zealand, as both countries saw merit in discussing their pertinent regional concerns with their European counterparts who have been active actors in the region (Hofmeister 2010, pp. 13–20).

5 Potential Strengths

Specific Asian perspectives vis-à-vis ASEM revolve around the following themes.

5.1 Ease of Political Interactions

ASEM is perceived to have a unique potential to promote and ease a process for initializing and facilitating an exchange of views and mutual understanding and for matters related to regional and global security.

Being an informal forum where the ease of political interactions is evident, for instance, China and Japan, India, and Pakistan (erstwhile rival nations) are forging together in their interactions with European counterparts. In the contemporary international system, where threats are increasingly transnational, ASEM is seen by most Asian and European actors alike as a vital platform to discuss security issues spanning across both continents and joint cooperation on the same. Though Europe's military role in Asia is limited, Asians see Europe as an important actor in the realm of non-traditional security in Asia.

Over the years, the EU has been a vital development partner for almost all Asian countries—the EU and its member states are still the world's largest aid and development assistance donors. The EU works with Asian partners on a number of non-traditional security issues like trafficking, water security, and climate change. Increasingly as both nations face the threat radical Islamic terrorism, there is much room for cooperation. As the common foreign and security policy of the EU evolves, however slowly, so should policy and security dialogue between Asia and Europe. Ranging from issues like the reform of the United Nations to the possibility of joint Euro-Asian peacekeeping operations (PKOs), there is much ground to be covered. Especially in the wake of the gruesome Paris and Brussels terrorist attacks,[15] intelligence sharing, joint anti-terror initiatives and the like will take prominence in the perspectives of both sides.

5.2 Prominence of Economy

The Asian nations predominantly perceive ASEM as a forum for economic interactions. Europe remains Asia's largest trading partner.[16] As is evident from the above-provided analysis of the perspectives of individual Asian nations, there is attention allotted to the economic ties that can be forged with Europe. The core concern of rising Asian economies is their economic relations with European nations. EU–Asia relations have focused on the facilitation of trade and investment through the negotiation of bilateral FTAs most of which have been long-drawn and without direction (See Chap. 3).[17] However, many have argued that an ASEM FTA would seek to consolidate individual efforts to create a pan-Eurasian free trade area to rival initiative the TPP. Discussing an ASEM FTA is a tough task, but at the very least ASEM and its subordinate meetings can serve to provide information on best practices and implications of

one partner's trade policy to others. This is already well discussed among APEC members. In the contemporary economic system, it is the norm to forge regional and transregional relations to expedite development and utilize economic potential.

5.3 A Unified Asian Front

A platform that portrays a unified Asian front on the international stage is rare. But this is a functional reality in ASEM. It can be arguably stated that the Asian nations, especially East Asian nations, have gone through an identity-building process and discourse through ASEM (Gilson 2002) to a limited extent. Globally, ASEM stands to promote multilateralism, being one of the biggest collaborations without the hegemon. Asian nations perceive ASEM through the scope of historical and geographical proximity. Additionally, it is a supporting regional platform to the United Nations and its agencies where issues can be discussed informally.

5.4 Robust Forum for Discussions

ASEM discussions provide a platform for informal interactions, including through seminars, Senior Officials' meetings, and sessions at Foreign Minister level, staff exchanges of analysts and planners as well as informal discussions bringing together academics and officials. The European experience in crisis management and the building of (soft) institutions are shared and discussed with Asian partners.

6 Pitfalls of the Asian Perspectives

Three elements characterize Asian perspectives.

6.1 Diversified Approach

Asian nations are not institutionalized under a "common roof" like that of the European Union but there is an overwhelming diversity arguably greater than that of the European nations. Their political, economic, and cultural parameters are varied. Furthermore, the geopolitical landscape in Asia is still unstable. European countries have been successful in creating a peaceful environment inside Europe (although the EU currently faces

some of its toughest challenges) based on common rules and functional cooperation. This contributed to restraining excessive rivalry between sovereign states. It seems that European experiences are still relevant in East Asia where possibility of territorial disputes exists. Cooperation aims are different for different Asian nations due to the diversity of mentioned parameters.

6.2 Priority and Alternatives

ASEM forms a low priority level of the national policy-making mechanisms of the Asian countries (as well as the European nations). As mentioned earlier, no nation has an official ASEM policy strategy or document. It is perceived as a forum for dialogue, not one to implement strategic interregional and global policies. In this context, cooperation projects in ASEM are limited either to some sectoral issues or to normative gestures. ASEM (in recent years) lacks tangible outcomes that actually contribute either to Europe-Asia relations or to regions individually. ASEM's operational principles are based on informality, mutual respect, and networking. From the genesis, any form of institutionalization was avoided and the non-institutional nature of ASEM was reaffirmed on several occasions. It has served as a regular dialogue to deepen the understanding of decision-makers in Asia and Europe; stimulate "people-to-people" contacts; and exchange information, views and ideas of common concern. Therefore, all ASEM declarations and statements were bound to be non-binding, and cooperation within ASEM was limited to sectoral issues. Furthermore, there are alternative regional forums (like APEC) and bilateral ties that are being utilized by Asian nations to further policies.

6.3 Economic and Strategic Questions

Crucially, economic and strategic questions should be conceptualized and subsequently institutionalized, and further imbedded in the decision-making process of both sides. A sustained and mutually beneficial EU-Asia relationship will in the future depend not only on ad hoc achievements in particular policy areas. ASEM can be more widely used as a platform for exchanges at civil society level. ASEM cooperation has been managed in a "top-down" and intergovernmental fashion, and it is one of the reasons why the role of civil society, for instance NGOs, is poorly developed. Given that the "ASEM way" is based on effective

perspectives formed in informal and non-binding discussions, a wide range of issues can be discussed by inviting more civil society actors.

7 Conclusion

The ASEM process is a culmination of historical ties between European and Asian nations moving toward a contemporary Eurasian interaction. The perspectives and histories of all nations involved have a crucial bearing on what the forum decides and implements and how it develops.

To revert to the question posed at the top of the chapter, ASEM is both a forum underutilized by Asian nations and one that is deficient itself. For most Asian countries, the colonial heritage continues to weigh in heavily. For a number of them, ASEM is either about interacting on an "equal footing" with Europe or they harbor suspicions vis-à-vis Europe (although not only within the confines of ASEM). Most remain wary of Europe and especially its linkages to NATO (one of the reasons why the EU has not yet been granted membership to the East Asia Summit, EAS).[18] This is also due to the fact that understanding of a sui-generis organization like the EU remains limited among Asian actors.

A number of Asian members of ASEM as discussed in the chapter also hope for ASEM to do more concrete things, albeit within the parameters of their own priorities. But ASEM has no set preamble or long-term agenda while it is far too informal to command effective perspectives from its membership. Informality is one of the biggest obstacles to its efficacy even though Asians and seemingly Europeans alike prefer it. At ASEM there remains a dearth of concentrated intent and implementation of policies and lack of definition of its role as such.

Asian nations and European nations have come together in ASEM but there is a massive diversity in the aims and perspectives that needs to be addressed. For now, ASEM punches below its weight and is more of a Europe-Asia fraternity meeting "emphasizing equal partnership, favoring general process of dialogue and cooperation based on mutual respect and benefit". In its third decade, however, ASEM members need to recognize the impact of their perceptions on ASEM and Asia-Europe relations and move beyond old ties. ASEM countries need to create new partnerships amidst a changing global order that necessitates a stronger collaboration between both regions and requires a formidable platform or even a more institutionalized organization in the international system.

Notes

1. Japan had its own colonies—Korea and Taiwan.
2. Germany dominated Jiaozhou (Kiaochow) Bay, Shandong, and the Huang He (Hwang-Ho) valley; Russia dominated the Liaodong Peninsula and Manchuria; the United Kingdom dominated Weihaiwei and the Yangtze Valley; and France dominated the Guangzhou Bay and several other southern provinces.
3. A forum for the meeting of Defence Ministers of the ten ASEAN Member States, namely, Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam, and eight Plus countries, namely Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, ROK, Russian Federation, and the United States.
4. TPP members include Singapore, Brunei, New Zealand, Chile, the US, Australia, Peru, Vietnam, Malaysia, Mexico, Canada, Japan.
5. Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) is a forum for 21 Pacific Rim member economies that promotes free trade throughout the Asia-Pacific region. www.apec.org.
6. In 2012, the total economic output of the world, as measured by GDP, was valued at EUR 56,577 billion, of which the ASEM partners accounted for 57.2% (ASEM Statistics).
7. Established in 1997, ASEF is the only permanently established institution of ASEM and is funded by voluntary contributions from its member governments and shares the financing of its projects with its civil society partners across Asia and Europe.
8. These priorities are included in the Asia-Europe Co-operation Framework 2000.
9. During the ASEM process, one alternating coordinator is in charge of the Southeast Asian region, whereas the other facilitates coordination in the Northeast and South Asia (NESA) group, including the 11 non-ASEAN countries within the Asian grouping.
10. For more details, see http://www.mofa.gov.pk/.
11. Within the ASEAN + 3 (APT) dialogue the ASEAN countries meet the PR China, Japan and South Korea. After a first meeting of the Heads of State in December 1997, they meet regularly once a year. A Joint Declaration from 1999 names economic, social and security issues as policy areas for cooperation.
12. See Yamamoto (2006) for an excellent overview on Japan-ASEM relations.
13. ASEAN was formed in 1967 by Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand to promote political and economic cooperation and regional stability. Brunei joined in 1984, Vietnam in 1995. Laos and

Burma became members in 1997, and Cambodia, ASEAN's tenth member, joined in 1999.

14. Atrocities and human rights violations carried out by the military Junta.
15. Carried out on 13 Friday 2015 in Paris, France, and on 22 March 2016 in Brussels, Belgium.
16. For an excellent overview of Europe and Asia relations, see Khandekar (2013).
17. EU FTAs are accompanied by a Political Cooperation Agreement (PCA), which links core EU values to trade through the "standard clause," whereby under certain circumstances, human rights abuses can trigger a suspension of the FTA.
18. The other reason relates uncertainties over the question how the EU can contribute to the forum.

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CHAPTER 12

Conclusion

Bart Gaens and Gauri Khandekar

Since the inception of the Asia-Europe Meeting in 1996, it has been the forum's objective to enhance political dialogue, strengthen economic cooperation, and promote socio-cultural exchange between the two regions. Taking ASEM's twentieth-anniversary summit held in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia, in 2016 as a signpost, this edited volume has provided a comprehensive and primarily empirical overview of the dialogue forum's past achievements, current challenges, and possible new directions. Against the backdrop of broader Asia-Europe relations and the shifting global agenda, the chapters in this volume have explored ASEM's core dimensions, which relate to the forum's objectives, institutional design, issue areas, and actors involved. The different analyses have assessed ASEM's achievements and added-value in today's global environment, but they have also taken a critical approach and have identified a number of core challenges.

A first key observation is that ASEM remains foremost a forum for dialogue. Including members such as the EU, China, Russia, India, and

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Japan, the forum's global weight undoubtedly seems enormous in terms of political importance, economy and trade, or population. Expectations have therefore been high, in particular as Europe-Asia relations have been regarded as punching below their weight. ASEM itself contributed to these high expectations by seeking to address lofty goals and very broad objectives aimed at "creating a partnership for greater growth," "maintaining and enhancing peace and stability" or "enhancing mutual awareness and understanding," which gave rise to an overly high number of initiatives and projects of a miscellaneous nature. Today, ASEM is criticized for remaining a talking shop that lacks visibility and one that has failed to deliver tangible outcomes.

In view of ASEM's institutional setup, however, ASEM's disappointing performance (for some) was perhaps predictable. In 1996 ASEM set out to promote trade, economy, and investment, while eschewing "sensitive" political issues. In the 2000s political and security-related issues increasingly appeared on the agenda. After the global financial crisis of 2007–2008 sustainable development and non-traditional security issues were emphasized. Connectivity is the latest overarching banner seeking to tie together dialogue and initiatives on trade, economy, infrastructure, sustainable development, and people-to-people exchanges. The agenda has thus been both ambitious and evolving. ASEM's institutional design, however, has not changed radically. ASEM remains open, comprehensive, informal and geared toward dialogue and networking. This importance of dialogue to reduce tensions, promote understanding, and facilitate ongoing work elsewhere cannot be denied, but it does set limitations to the extent to which ASEM can solve problems in the world. The dual tension existing between informality and institutionalization, and between dialogue and projects leading to tangible outcomes, remains one of ASEM's key challenges for the future.

This tension also forms a central theme in the other chapters in this volume. In the area of economy, ASEM has made very limited progress in enhancing Europe-Asia economic relations, and the level of engagement and output that has ensued in this issue area has drastically lost pace as compared to ASEM's initial years. ASEM is therefore in need of new directions to revitalize the so-called economic pillar. ASEM could aim to achieve result-oriented goals that fall under the global multilateral trade agenda, either by setting up a minilateral group aimed at multilateral trade liberalization under the auspices of the WTO or by aiming to launch an ASEM-wide plurilateral FTA in the long term. These ideas only gain in strength in

view of the bleak future forecast for the TPP, which has the USA at its core, whereas both in Europe and in Asia strong support still exists for FTAs. Also the rise of protectionism including in the USA offers ASEM the chance to rekindle the economic pillar and promote free trade and open markets.

ASEM's security agenda as well reveals the gap between expectations and ambitions on the one hand and capabilities and achievements on the other. ASEM has very limited resources and a restricted mandate to tackle security-related issues in a result-oriented manner. ASEM's penchant for informality, its excessively ambitious and overly comprehensive agenda, and different modes of governance in Asia and Europe have impeded joint policies in the fields of traditional and non-traditional security alike. A more focused agenda forms a possible way forward, in particular in the non-traditional security sphere in issues where ASEM can make a difference, even if only as a platform provider for informal discussions.

Cultural cooperation is an issue area that stands out in the ASEM process because it is driven by the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), ASEM's only permanently established institution. While only occupying a residual position at the time of ASEM's creation, social/cultural cooperation has developed into ASEM's most sustainable and effective field of cooperation. ASEF has facilitated the inclusion of civil society in the official process, functioning as a cultural broker and an interlocutor between governments and civil society. Cultural cooperation has also increasingly been geared toward policy recommendations, underscoring the more intangible benefits of interaction in this field. Furthermore, ASEF has promoted intellectual and educational exchanges and has succeeded in profiling itself as an expert on Asia-Europe relations. Even so, many criticisms directed toward ASEM are reproduced at the ASEF level. An elitist approach, a broad but shallow tackling of issues, and a limited impact are all challenges and shortcomings that show that ASEF is tightly conditioned by ASEM's overall political agenda and limitations. Yet, ASEM draws its strengths from ASEF's success, turning the cultural pillar into a "signature" interregional cooperation that buttresses ASEM's relevance and sets it apart from other regional and transregional institutions.

ASEM's efforts to include "the people" in Asia-Europe relations is further clear in the parliamentary partnership that gathers in the sidelines of the official process. The Asia-Europe Parliamentary Partnership (ASEP) has grown into an established international parliamentary institution (IPI), a recognized part of the ASEM family, and a valid part of global governance. Nevertheless, the link between ASEP and ASEM remains

weak. ASEM's informal nature and focus on dialogue in combination with its elitist history has prevented ASEP from more efficiently feeding into the summit. Diversity, a lack of continuity and prioritization, and insufficient resources are internal challenges that form additional obstacles. Looking ahead to the future, it is vital that ASEP deepens its two-way working relationship with ASEM, in the first place by creating a Standing Committee. Furthermore, ASEP has an important role to play in decreasing ASEM's perceived democratic deficit and increase the accountability of the process. This importance will only increase in the future, in view of ASEP's gradual institutionalization and ASEM's increased readiness to include parallel dialogues into the summits.

Media and the general public are two of ASEM's interlinked stakeholder groups. In general visibility and public awareness of ASEM remain low, in spite of several visibility-promoting efforts undertaken during the past two decades. Media attention given to the summits has been higher in Asia than in Europe, but overall it has been declining. Media coverage is most often neutral and varies depending on the "home-country" factor of the summit and on eye-catching bilateral meetings taking place in the sidelines. More importantly, both mutual awareness and links between the people of Asia and Europe remain below par. An important socialization process involving both state and non-state actors does take place in ASEM, but it remains oriented toward elites. Promoting a more correct understanding of what ASEM is and does, and expanding outreach beyond the elite level remain important tasks ahead.

Increasing output in the form of more demonstrable outcomes is one way to improve the visibility of an international forum. Indeed, the most recent ASEM summit of 2016 underscored the need to implement "substantial human-centered cooperation projects … creating opportunities for all and more tangible outcomes." However, no consensus exists as to how to implement this. One possible way forward is to focus on flagship initiatives involving all members and with a focus on connectivity and sustainability. An ASEM Center on Urbanization and an ASEM Center on Human Security and Climate Action, for example, could be created, as urbanization, human security and climate action are crucial issues in which both regions have shared interests. Another possible vista for the future as proposed in this volume is to focus, in view of ASEM's substantial expansion, on projects/initiatives by groups or coalitions of states within ASEM based on so-called issue-based leadership. These groups already exist on paper, but the political will to implement the objectives,

transparency and follow-up are essential elements, largely absent thus far, in order to implement "enhanced cooperation" in the future.

Furthermore, also in view of recent enlargements, it is clear that today ASEM's interregional forum does not revolve around two clearly demarcated geographic regions. Nevertheless, in addition to bilateral, supranational and multilateral fora, ASEM serves the purpose of bringing together Europe and Asia as regions, and hence aims to turn interregionalism into practice. Yet, internal divisions are obvious in both Europe and Asia. The EU has sought to implement a common European policy toward the Asian region, but European countries each have individual and at best sub-regionally shared priorities targeted toward individual Asian countries, Asia as a region and ASEM as a forum. These interests and strategic orientations are rooted in contingent capacities for engagement, historical backgrounds, or geographic locations. For Asian countries, ASEM remains an under-utilized forum, due to perspectives rooted in the historical legacy, a suspicion of Europe's transatlantic ties, and a lack of understanding of an institution such as the EU. Furthermore, ASEM's Asian grouping is bewilderingly heterogeneous, and most countries bestow a high priority level to ASEM when it comes to national policy-making mechanisms, and economic and strategic questions are in need of clearer conceptualization and subsequent institutionalization.

At twenty years of age, ASEM stands at the crossroads. As mentioned in the introduction to this volume, ASEM remains a highly needed forum, in view of the forum's institutional development, the broadened contours and implications of interregionalism, and the changing international environment. A more focused agenda with result-oriented goals, further efforts to promote the involvement of all stakeholder groups beyond the elite level, and a more dedicated engagement between European and Asian countries in ASEM are all vital tools in bringing the envisaged "Partnership for the Future through Connectivity" to fruition.

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