

Responses to Rapid Social Change in Southeast Asia: Introduction

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European-Asian cooperation is an important key to mastering the geo-strategic challenges of the 21st century. To this extent, for several years now the Bertelsmann Stiftung has been committed to intensifying understanding with Asia. The aim is to gain a realistic view of the opportunities and risks afforded by this, the largest of continents, where, as Prof. Jean-Pierre Lehmann of Evian Group coined it „both the strongest economic dynamism and the greatest geopolitical fault-lines“ are to be found.

On November 12, 2008, the Foundation and the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam jointly organized an international symposium in Hanoi, attended by decision-makers from the worlds of politics, business and science: In total, more than 40 experts from Europe and almost all the ASEAN member states attended. The focus was on socio-political change in South-East Asia and its implications for European-Asian relations. The lectures published here document some of the central findings of this intercultural dialogue on the issue of „Responses to Rapid Social Change in South East Asia“.

The international forum was strongly influenced by the awful flooding in Vietnam, the political unrest in Thailand not to mention further recent crises, all of which in the opinion of Vu Dzong, Deputy Foreign Minister of Vietnam, simply serve to underscore the urgency of international cooperation. He commented that: „ASEAN is anxiously watching the eventful year of 2008 as it unfolds: Already we have witnessed one of the worst energy crises in years, one of the worst food crises in decades, and a global financial meltdown not seen since as long ago as the 1930s. We also have seen moments of uneasiness between some members of the family and the full force of anger of mother nature with far-reaching consequences for SEA and its people. [...] Of course, ASEAN states reckon the fact that the world is changing much faster than any government can foresee or predict, let alone dealing effectively with the complexities and challenges brought about. In this very much interconnected world ASEAN has always and will always need to rely on its friends and partners to tackle those challenges together. The EU-ASEAN link therefore is substantial.“ There is significant scope for very intense and productive collaboration between the EU and ASEAN in addressing these challenges and mitigating the threats. The three most urgent tasks are to prevent war in Asia, to generate greater inclusive growth and to combat the increasingly inexorable forces of climate change. All three require not only minor policy adjustments, but fundamental changes and adjustments to mindsets, priorities and, consequently, patterns of behavior, remarked Jean-Pierre Lehmann of Evian Group. It became clear during the symposium that

South East Asia and Europe rely on each other not only in mastering global challenges, for they share common interests and values, which facilitate mutual relations and facilitate strategic cooperation.

Championing a peaceful, multi-polar world order based on fixed rules and regulations under the aegis of strong and respected multilateral organizations is a clear expression of their common interests. As Jürgen Fitschen of Deutsche Bank commented, this interest is based on a mutual commitment to open markets and direct foreign investments which, despite all the current loss of confidence, are the most effective means to foster economic growth and stability. Josef Janning of Bertelsmann Foundation pointed out that this is also to the benefit of the development of good governance practices and of the scale of international political integration and cooperation in both regions. However, the process of regional integration in both regions takes different forms as Dr. Peter Hauswedell of the German Federal Foreign Office pointed out: While the driving force of regionalization in Europe is politics, ASEAN is integrated by the markets. Amitav Acharya, University of Bristol, explained that the EU model of cooperation is too distinctive and specific to the circumstances in Europe to be replicated in Asia. Asia is far more diverse, culturally, economically and politically; moreover its members' realization of full sovereignty after centuries of colonial rule is too recent to allow the alliance to be tempted into supranationalism. Nevertheless, after the EU, ASEAN is today the world's most successful regional organization. And, as highlighted, it is quite probable that the ASEAN charter with its intended challenges to the problematic policy of non-interference and unanimous decision-making processes may lead to a more direct, comprehensive and problem-oriented form of regionalism.

Cultural diversity is one of the most important values that the EU member states share with the countries of South East Asia, and forms a central element of domestic and bilateral relations. According to Prof. K.S. Nathan, IKON, linguistic, religious and ethnic pluralism is the reality for countries in both regions. Dealing constructively with different cultural, religious and linguistic identities is both a challenge and a threat. In particular since the terrorist attacks of 9/11, political decision-makers and the media in the West have been following social conflict and violence in Asia with concern and interpreting them in cultural terms. Here, as Prof. Thomas Engelbert, Hamburg, outlined, it is specifically South East Asia, home to one fifth of the world's approx. 1.2 billion Muslims, not to mention a broad variety of Indian-Hindu, Buddhist and Confucian traditions, as well as a broad swath of ethnic minorities that has the reputation of being a breeding ground for cultural conflict. At any rate, these trends are definitely important for international security policy considerations – and of growing interest for Europe's Common Foreign and Security Policy, another reason why it was closely discussed at the symposium. Prof. K.S. Nathan concluded that ASEAN and the EU possess appropriate institutions and converging values for managing cultural pluralism in a constructive

way, while Prof. Bob Hadiwinata, University of Parahyangan, stressed that viable civil societies are the key to strengthening democracy and promoting religious pluralism in both regions.

This is the background to the lectures published here, which we have selected for this special issue of ASIEN from among the various presentations:

The volume commences with the special study on cultural conflicts in South East Asia, which the Bertelsmann Foundation commissioned from the Heidelberg Institute for International Conflict Research. By means of empirical and qualitative analyses, the institute concludes that South East Asia is especially prone to domestic and bilateral conflicts over culture and identity. That said, the countries in the region possess an extraordinary potential to ensure the permanent peaceful coexistence of the numerous religious, linguistic, and otherwise culturally distinct groupings. The nature of conflicts in Southeast Asia, so Prof. Aurel Croissant, Heidelberg, hardly serves to prove Huntington's famous theory of the „clash of civilizations“ (1993). The struggle between diverse cultures is not the driving force behind international tensions in Southeast Asia. And as Prof. Ahmad Fauzi Abdul Hamid adds in his article on the repoliticization of Islam in Malaysia and Indonesia, in particular political Islam in South East Asia takes many shades and did not develop as a global anti-Western movement, but can be attributed first and foremost to local socio-economic reasons. In the author's opinion, strategies for the political inclusion and participation by political Islam in South East Asia promise more success in the long-term than the anti-terror campaign propagated by Western security experts.

Renowned Prof. Carlyle A. Thayer, University of New South Wales, and Rodolfo C. Severino, former Secretary General of ASEAN, then put forward firm proposals for further European/Asian cooperation. Both believe the EU has an important role to play in strengthening the multilateral organizations so important to South East Asia.

According to Rodolfo Severino it would be in the EU's interest to do so, to promote EU's faith in international cooperation and regionalism and to create a favorable investment climate in South East Asia by means of rule of law, independent courts and regulatory bodies, predictable policies, fair competition and regional agreed investment guarantees. After offering a comprehensive overview of the closely-knit relations between the EU, ASEAN, ARF and ASEM, Thayer concludes that the EU and its Asian interlocutors need to prioritize at least six of the most pressing and long-term challenges to Asian regionalism and regional security that demand multi-lateral co-operation: the implementation of the ASEAN Charter and East-Asian community building; Australia's proposal for the creation of an Asia Pacific Community; Myanmar; conflict resolution; climate change; and nuclear energy.

The conference showed quite clearly how, from the European view, the region between China and India functions as a strategic hinge of inestimable importance that calls for an intensive dialog at the levels of politics, business and civil society. In the region itself there is a strong need for an exchange of information and views

with the European actors, whose experiences serve in many respects as a source of inspiration. An effective process of regionalization and integration that impacts beyond South East Asia's borders by fostering a climate of stronger cooperation will benefit not only ASEAN itself but also its European partners because of its strategic, geopolitical and economic importance for many of the neighboring powers and the world as a whole.