

## REALITY AND THEORY

# PATHWAYS OF INTEGRATION IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

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### Abstract

ASEAN throughout its existence faced a number of challenges including dramatic changes in the security framework of a particularly turbulent region as well as the financial crisis of the late 1990s and the multiple controversies among its Member States and the influence of changing neighbouring powers. In order to survive it had, on the one hand, to be flexible enough to cope with the challenges of internal diversity, territorial integrity and the political fragility of regimes in South-East Asia. On the other hand, it had to be sufficiently innovative to be able to face bilateral territorial tensions and huge regional security challenges. The ASEAN success is especially evident given the poor record of other Asian regional organizations. The current article provides a striking comparison of its achievements with the lack of substantive results of SAARC grouping in South East Asia. It furthermore claims that lessons derived from the ASEAN practices could be relevant for relatively successful integration blocks, such as the European Union and Eurasian integration process. In its internal processes the ASEAN way proved to be an effective method for organizing regional cooperation. It avoided on the one hand the standing European conflict between intergovernmental and community methods and was able to show the huge potential of various intergovernmental networking in supporting further progress in deepening and widening regional cooperation. On the other hand, the ASEAN way is a bottom-up method excluding hierarchical decision making and a single country supremacy. In terms of organizing relations with external partners the Association positioned itself as not only Asia's most important regional organization, but also the driving agent for a regional order in trade, economic, security, and identity needs. The practice of concentric circles of partnerships proved flexible enough and able of combining political leadership of the hard core (ASEAN centrality) with openness and inclusiveness, at various degrees of near and far partners. The challenges ahead are internal fragmentation and, in particular, the potentially dividing pressure of security challenges in the neighbouring area, often deepened by power politics of great global actors like China and USA.

### Keywords:

Regionalism; Asia Pacific; international institutions; regional order; ASEAN way; ASEAN Community; dialogue partnerships; SAARC.

How could ASEAN possibly survive the dramatic changes, incurred by the security framework of this particularly turbulent region, over 50 years, including the financial crisis of the late 1990s and the multiple controversies among Member States, as well as

the influence of changing neighbouring powers? On the one hand, ASEAN had to be flexible enough to cope with the challenges of internal diversity, territorial integrity and the political fragility of regimes in South-East Asia<sup>1</sup>. On the other hand, it had to be suffi-

ciently innovative to be able to face bilateral territorial tensions and huge regional security challenges<sup>2</sup>.

However, it is a matter of fact that ASEAN is in relatively good health. The Kuala Lumpur Declaration of 2015 noted the true milestones reached: the 'Establishment of the 'ASEAN Community', according to the 'Roadmap 2009–2015', and the 'ASEAN Vision 2020' (1997), including a 'Political-Security Community', an 'Economic Community' and the 'ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprints', as well as initiatives for further integration and regional 'connectivity'. Second, ASEAN was able to consolidate its driving seat in the surrounding concentric circles architecture of differentiated regional cooperation in the Asia-Pacific: ASEAN + Three (China, Japan, south Korea), ASEAN + Six (ASEAN + three + India, Australia and New Zealand), and the East Asian Community, as well as in the wider ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Almost 50 years after its foundation in 1967, ASEAN, on the one hand, feels confirmed in its informal, flexible and functional approach, known as the 'ASEAN way'; on the other, it is challenged to construct new forms of institutionalization able to cope with the need for a more stable order in the large Asia-Pacific area.

### 1

The comparison of ASEAN's dynamics with the very poor achievements of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is particularly interesting<sup>3</sup>. In fact,

this regional grouping, which has the largest population worldwide, seems to have not only a very low degree of complementarity among national economies, which explains the poor rate of intraregional trade and lack of incrementalism, but also experiences recurrent political/military tensions between its two leaders, India and Pakistan, notably in the Kashmir area. The other two main enduring reasons for its stagnation include the legacy of its colonial past and the still relevant problems of underdevelopment.

The bilateral conflict between the two nuclear powers India and Pakistan, purposefully left off the SAARC agenda, does hinder real progress in regional economic cooperation. All in all, the results over three decades – regular intergovernmental summits, many attempts to improve information exchange, policy coordination, fledging networking at civil society level, the enlargement of Afghanistan, and so on – even if more relevant than expected – are very modest. Given the present circumstances, the difficulties of SAARC as a mere forum in one of the most dangerous regions of the world illustrate the relevance of the high political factors: an open security conflict between the two main Member States.

This political obstacle makes it difficult to manage the consequences of internal asymmetry between the members and a leader of the magnitude of India (70% of the land and 80% of the population), the leadership of which is neither recognized nor working. Even other regional organizations (including MERCOSUR, ASEAN, and SADC) are char-

<sup>1</sup> ASEAN was created in 1967 by five countries: Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and the Philippines, joined by Brunei in 1984 (Bangkok Declaration <http://www.asean.org/news/item/the-asean-declaration-bangkok-declaration> and Bali Declaration of 1976). In 1992 (Singapore Declaration), the Framework Agreement on enhancing ASEAN economic cooperation was approved, and focused on the project of establishing an ASEAN free trade area before 2002 for the six countries, and by 2007 for the others. See Acharya 2012, Dent 2008, Foot 2003, Garnaut and Drysdale 1994, Roberts, 2012.

<sup>2</sup> Among the hardest regional security challenges are: the numerous territorial controversies regarding sovereignty on islands, starting from Korea–Japan to China with Philippines, Vietnam and other neighbours in South–China Sea the bilateral Japan–China tensions, the issue of Taiwan, and the uncertain relationship between India and China [Acharya 2014].

<sup>3</sup> SAARC was born at the Dacca Summit (1985) following a Bangladesh proposal of 1980. The institutional set includes: the Council of Ministers, the Standing Committee of Foreign Secretaries, the other standing committees, the technical Committees (i.e. concerning agricultural policy), the Committee on Economic Cooperation, the Katmandu Secretariat, and the Documentation Centre in New Delhi [Dash 2008].

acterized by internal asymmetries that do not stop regional agreements between larger and smaller Member States (MSs), reached by way of compromises, from progressing. Clearly, internal imbalances are only part of the explanation. A second internal negative factor (common to many regional groupings including developing countries) must not be forgotten: the weakness of functional dynamics of regional economic and trade integration. In a context where intraregional trade does not show potential dynamics beyond the 10 per cent, the perspective of a free-trade agreement (FTA) cannot become a driving factor.

More than the weak functional and ideational dynamics, the absence of reconciliation and mutual confidence-building measures condemns regional cooperation to the margins. A bilateral political understanding between the two major powers of a region – as in Western Europe (France and Germany), in Latin America (Argentina and Brazil), and in ASEAN (some MS were enemies during the Vietnam War) – largely explains the success of regional groupings elsewhere. Second, unlike in South-East Asia, there is not a shared feeling of a common external political threat that pulls together the members of SAARC. As far as ASEAN is concerned, the shared perceptions of geoeconomic external challenges (the growing fear of marginalization within the globalizing economy) and geopolitical uncertainties are increasing in the Asia-Pacific<sup>4</sup>.

Compared with the emergent role of the ASEAN security community, and of ARF as a security complex providing stability in the post-Cold War era, the South Asian enduring crises show that, unlike in South-East Asia, when bilateralism or globalism are unable to provide solutions for regional conflicts, a regional association does not yet offer more than a forum for regular high-level intergovernmental meetings. The problem for SAARC is not only that it is missing the ASEAN way but also the negative role of the political variable.

Finally, another potential external driver is clearly showing its limits: the EU policy of supporting the Kathmandu SAARC Secretariat and regional cooperation in Southern Asia has marginal influence. Since 1992, and particularly since the joint Memorandum of 1996, and according to the concept of partnership for development, SAARC can benefit from technical and financial assistance from the EU for the purpose of strengthening regional institutions and intra-regional trade, supporting joint policies among developing countries, networking and communications, research, training, and rural and energy policies. Interregional cooperation between the EU and SAARC goes beyond previous policies of aid to developing countries: partner countries are not only helped by adjusting their economies to global competition and expanding trade, but also by building safety networks against social exclusion. The SAARC business networks are increasingly proactive, including in regional and interregional dialogues.

However, the EU interregional policies are definitely more successful where internal driving factors of cooperation balance its supporting role, as in ASEAN and MERCOSUR. Furthermore, the bilateral relationship with the single emergent regional power does not look to be an alternative: the record of the EU–India Strategic Partnership (2004) and Action Plan (2005) is very poor [Wülbers 2007]. In addition, this partnership has to face new political challenges: not only the triangular competitive relationship (including economic, nuclear, and political cooperation) between the US, the EU, and India, but also, since 2014, the implications of the Narendra Modi government's combination of economic liberalism and political nationalism, which strengthen the rejection of the EU's normative power assertiveness, which is perceived as undermining the competitive advantage of developing countries [Bava 2013].

<sup>4</sup> The breakdown of the Soviet Union deleted one of the external components of South-Asian tensions and pushed India to a dialogue with the US and ASEAN. In the case of Pakistan, the solidarity of the Muslim international community played a negative role, unlike in Indonesia and Malaysia. With the exception of some UN conferences (on poverty, for example) and World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations, the common external challenges have not yet brought the SAARC countries together.

## 2

ASEAN is not only Asia's most important regional organization, but also a true novelty in international relations in East Asia and the driving agent for a regional order in trade, economic, security, and identity needs. Several caveats are needed when comparing an association of sovereign States with a union of States and citizens like the EC. First, from a historical institutionalist approach, we take into account both the heavy colonial legacy and the anti-colonial feelings of national independence and sovereignty. Second, when considering the controversial relationship of each regional grouping to the global power relations context, China and Japan are both external and internal actors (ASEAN + Three and ASEAN + Six) in region-building and the US maintains an enduring influence. Out of any Eurocentric and evolutionary understanding or regional models, we must combine both of these approaches (focusing on historical and international factors) in a very cautious way. ASEAN States were able to develop their intergovernmental cooperation, in spite of unusual obstacles and extraordinary difficulties by taking stock of a *longue durée* 'regioness' as a background for their new will for political autonomy.

The deep historical roots of regional ties must first be searched for in the pre-colonial tributary system at China's south, although the colonial legacy is a dividing factor, as is the anti-colonial struggle. In the mid-1960s, ASEAN was using a political driver (anti-communism) for regional cooperation, rather than looking for a free trade agenda; more recently, ASEAN has been using a complex economic, shared sociocultural and political community agenda in its search for regional ties and cooperation.

In this context, it also approved a kind of constitutional document, the ASEAN Charter of 2007 [Tay 2008]. This relevant normative endeavour should not be underestimated: it combines the de facto integration with a *de jure*

commitment to common principles: both may foster an evolution of the traditional principle of non-interference. For example, the ongoing democratic transition in Myanmar benefitted from ASEAN institutional peer pressure more than from that of the US or the United Nations (UN) declarations. The distinctiveness of the ASEAN path to regional 'cooperation' (which looks, in spite of the discourse, a more appropriate concept than integration, which would entail explicit supranational dimensions) is confirmed after 50 years.

What do we mean by new will of autonomy? The interest of some ASEAN MS, in the aftermath of the end of Cold War, to emulate the Western European success story and, second, to react to the danger of diluting ASEAN within the broader interregional liberalization carried out by Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC)<sup>5</sup>, played a catalyst role. ASEAN was and is still challenged by US, Japan, and China projects in this regional cooperation area. In its 1994 Jakarta Ministerial Meeting, APEC adopted an ambitious programme to establish an interregional free trade area by 2020. The establishment of APEC was part of the first wave of competing interregionalist projects in the Asian and Pacific region. But two opposite barriers hindered the Clinton Administration's project of a comprehensive APEC as a model of so-called open regionalism; that is, first, ASEAN's fear of being absorbed into an intercontinental US-centred organization and, second, a preference of many Asian States for a very soft, multiple geometry – a most favoured nation-based (MFN) type of APEC. Quickly, APEC revealed its weaknesses. The Bush Administration focus on the war against terrorism ironically transformed the US presence in this region into an unintended external federalizing factor in East Asian regional cooperation without the US [Dent 2008].

Regional cooperation in East Asia is a varied and complex phenomenon combining Asiaization and openness. However, deeper

<sup>5</sup> APEC was initiated in 1988/1989 and has included, since 1994, the following Pacific rim countries: US, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, the ten ASEAN countries, Japan, South Korea and China, as well as Hong Kong and Taiwan, Mexico and Papua New Guinea joined in 1993. Chile followed in 1994 and Russia joined four years later. See [Garnaut, Drysdale 1994; Haggard 1997; Higgott 1995].

regionalism developed in South-East Asia, generally without the US, which does not mean against it. The enhanced weight of endogenous factors and the diffused wish for autonomy from the US do not mean that new regionalism necessarily shifts towards a kind of instrumental tool of emergent regional leaders, like China or even Indonesia. ASEAN may, indeed, be considered as the hard core of an emerging East Asian regional order.

When considering the internal factors, one should look beyond the dichotomy between the pessimism of realists [Ravenhill 2010] and the optimism of constructivists. Cognitive local ideational factors matter, as Acharya [Acharya 2001] so well underlined, as do States' choices, ethnic and cultural networks, business communities, and all play a transnational integrating role. After the end of the bipolar world, the main driving force became the business community and ASEAN could gradually be defined as an intergovernmental and a network-based regional association, needing further institution-building. For a while, the ASEAN economic community's main project has been the development of the relevant framework for a common effective preferential tariff that enhances commercial liberalization (that is, without a custom union, while still fostering further integration, unlike NAFTA or the European Free Trade Association (EFTA) model<sup>6</sup>). The FTA project boosted the common market project, enhanced cooperation on several security issues, and the 2007 ASEAN Charter (as well as its later implications). This practical and gradual incrementalism was successful in deepening

and expanding the ASEAN integration agenda beyond liberal free trade. As far as ASEAN + Three is concerned, we underline the growing relevance of the issues related to monetary cooperation in East Asia (Chang Mai Initiative 2000).

Indeed, the ASEAN way means, first, that transnational private networks, ethnic business, technological clusters, subregional policy communities, and free trade areas are pushing the governments forward. Second, personal contacts and business networks created along ethnic and cultural lines, and the spillover effects thereof, build a complex multi-tier system using geographical proximity and formal and informal meetings as a means to strengthen shared interests in regional cooperation and global competition.

Of course, as a consequence of such an approach, the institutional structure is, relatively speaking, rather light. There is no doubt that, though in progress, the General Secretariat in Jakarta is limited in scope, budget, and authority, and a credible dispute settlement procedure is still missing. However, the annual summit and the Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers (that make decisions on the basis of a consensual procedure and in a collegial way), provide the framework for the multiple intergovernmental networks – the permanent and ad hoc committees. Moreover, an increasing number of ministers, officials, high-level civil servants, and NGOs are included in the multi-actor and multilevel cooperation process, which is composed by an impressive number of working groups, conferences, senior official groups, and single-issue regimes<sup>7</sup>. The ASEAN system

<sup>6</sup> Detail about NAFTA is in the next paragraph. Regarding EFTA, it was founded in 1960 by the European countries (UK, Scandinavian countries, Austria, Switzerland, and Liechtenstein and rejected the pattern of supranational integration characterizing the Rome Treaties of 1957, in the name of a mere free trade area. However, only Norway, Switzerland, Liechtenstein, and Iceland have not yet become members of the EC/EU: they are members of the European Economic Area (EEA) an EU's external circle including States who accept EU regulation without taking part in the decision making process (transforming them de facto into satellites).

<sup>7</sup> ASEAN's large array of relevant sectoral bodies and working groups is about to be developed, for example, as far as the security community is concerned, ASEAN addresses non-traditional security issues: law enforcement, international migration, inland water management, conflict resolution, anti-terrorism, cyber-security, peacekeeping, capability-building, trafficking of persons (and its implication for labour market), aviation security, maritime security, counterterrorism, risk management, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief exercise, ASEAN drug free (ASOD), fight against transnational crime (within ARF), fight against armed robbery and sea piracy, rise of radicalization and violent extremism, multi-year strategic exercises, as well as bilateral dialogues with India, Australia, Japan, and China.

of multiple and inclusive intergovernmental meetings works well as a strong vehicle for elites socialization and, in spite of the enduring decentralization, is also gradually building a more shared identity and a common approach to regional and global challenges as an extension of the internal security practices<sup>8</sup>.

ASEAN's history is characterized by three critical junctures in a *longue durée* process of deepening and expanding regional cooperation. The first juncture was in the mid 1960s when ASEAN was founded, according to the bipolar world structure, as a security community ally to the US when facing communist expansion. However, the internal divisions on security issues between the post-1965-massacres Indonesian regime, pro-UK Malaysia and Singapore, the strong influence of the US in the Philippines, and internal bilateral conflicts were some of the main factors restraining economic cooperation and political autonomy for a decade. The Bali Summit of 1976 essentially reconfirmed the primacy of political cooperation, thus defending an anti-communist international identity within that turbulent area.

The second critical juncture was the end of Cold War and of nuclear confrontation between East and West (as a consolidation of the new regional context after the end of the Vietnam War). In this apparently new, peaceful, and liberal context, a change took place in relation to economic priorities (Singapore Declaration 1992). Internal factors (business networks) and a changing perception of common external challenges acted as catalysts on regional cooperation, particularly the new need to react to growing international competition and liberalization. The real ASEAN refoundation process, focusing on free trade, was also a domino effect of the troubled Uruguay Round, the Single European Act, and NAFTA. To increase the competitiveness of ASEAN, companies became a new *raison d'être* of the regional organization. This consolidation was simultaneous to the ability to expand and to include former enemies,

such as Vietnam (1995), Laos (1997, jointly with Myanmar), and Cambodia (1999). Political confidence-building measures continued to expand: in 1995, the Southeast Asian Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone Treaty was signed, with the aim of achieving a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone.

The third critical juncture was the deep financial crisis at the end of the 1990s. By looking at the ASEAN revival, one can see that during the economic and financial crisis of 1997–1998 inward-looking policies prevailed; but gradually the growing expectation of a more institutionalized intergovernmental regional framework for settling disputes and strengthening regional cooperation would prevail over obstacles and resistance (Hanoi Summit 1998). ASEAN not only survived the financial crisis of the late 1990s, but also succeeded in starting a common anti-crisis programme and in relaunching cooperation with Japan and China. Step by step, a form of local intergovernmental watchdog has appeared on the ASEAN agenda: the 'Manila network of mutual surveillance', though a less vague name or description could be substituted. A regional approach to internal adjustment has been more effective than the global (International Monetary Fund (IMF) monitoring and constraining system [Beeson, Stubbs 2008]. During the next decade, the urgent need of coping with common challenges helped to develop a new ASEAN awareness and social cohesion, as well as an oscillating but increasingly consolidated processes of democratization (in Indonesia, Philippines, Malaysia, and Myanmar).

Among ASEAN's shortcomings and the challenges it faces, one has to take into account the enduring weight of great economic disparities among ASEAN countries in terms of industrial and technological development, labour costs, and export capacity. Many observers still stress the cultural and political heterogeneity of the region and the particular State traditions (populism, religious parties, role of the army, corruption, and so on). Furthermore, despite progress in many coun-

<sup>8</sup> We mean both bilateral and multilateral confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy mechanisms, and intelligence sharing.

tries the democratization process knows ups and downs, as the case of Thailand well shows. The worst-case scenario was and is that economic and social crises and political instability (coupled with secession movements and/or terrorism, as shown in the Philippines, Indonesia, and Myanmar) could boost infra-regional conflicts. Refugee problems between Myanmar, Indonesia, and Malaysia, protectionist conjunctural policies, the external consequences of Indonesian forest destruction, and new domestic political instability, for example, could call into question the delicate balance between external and internal politics in the region. However, the worst-case scenario looks less likely in 2015 than 15 years ago, which is extremely remarkable given the global context.

At present, economy and politics have closer links than in the past. The ASEAN crisis is largely over: nominal gross domestic product (GDP) for the ASEAN bloc has risen from 1.3 trillion USD in 2007 to 2.4 trillion USD in 2013, and the ASEAN national economies are much more coordinated than 15 years ago. Previous Action Plans consolidated the achieved cooperation and started providing common answers to common problems: calling for foreign investments, planning infrastructures, and coordinating currency policies. The convergence of external tariffs (between 0.05% and 1.69%) happened even in the absence of a custom union. The current intergovernmental bargain on non-tariff barriers (NTB) raises hopes that intra-regional trade will overtake the current 24 per cent of the total, although that is still far from the 60 per cent of the EU. Regarding limits to convergence, the policies for the developing areas still depend on the World Bank (WB), Asian Development Bank, and 'ASEAN + Three'.

ASEAN is deepening its own way to regional cooperation while undergoing important changes in community-building.

### 3

What will be the ASEAN contribution to consolidating a stable economic and political Asia-Pacific area where major regional and global State-actors defend their interests? What

has to be further underlined is that dynamics are intertwined with a new security agenda; the ASEAN States decided not only to discuss these issues within the open ARF, but also to create an ASEAN political/security community. In this context, we are witnessing the development of a differentiated 'concentric circles' system, with the consolidation of ASEAN + Three, that is by including China, Southern Korea, Japan, and ARF.

Furthermore, there is the dynamics of the ASEAN + Six (including India, Australia, and New Zealand, as well as the original three). In this context, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) (2012) provides a legal framework for investments and trade. The larger East Asian Summits (which included the US and Russia) framed the debate about an 'East Asian Community' and the relevant implications at regional and global levels. Third, in relation to security issues, it is important to mention that the even wider ARF, including ASEAN + Six, the EU, the US, Pakistan, and several minor Asia-Pacific countries, is characterized by ASEAN's pivotal role as a driving force for conflict prevention and peacekeeping, including in the troubled waters of South China Sea.

The ARF was created in 1993–1994 to pursue and adapt, in the new international context characterized by a security vacuum, the original aim of stability and peace in the area. The major challenge for South-East Asian States is to place ASEAN within the framework of the evolving Asia-Pacific security triangle between the giants – the US, Japan, and China. In spite of the serious territorial controversies and political tensions between China and many of its neighbours, this attempt is proceeding quite successfully so far also thanks to the proactive contribution of both Russia and the EU: comparing the ARF's record with the recent decline (2013–2015) of the more institutionalized Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) may be instructive.

The ARF still is a weak structure based on consultation. However, it is more than pure rhetoric. For example, the management of the complex relationship with the major power and

trade partner, China, in a multilateral framework, despite China's current economic transition, nationalistic tendencies, internal uncertainties, and troubles in South China Sea, is a crucial issue for the regional security agenda, even according to leading Chinese intellectuals [Qin Yaqing, Zhu Liqun 2012]. That is why the regular intergovernmental meetings, notably of heads of States, are so important in terms of socialization, establishing confidence-building measures, preventive diplomacy, and peaceful conflict settlement, and providing the EU with a voice. The renouncement by the ASEAN countries and China of the use of force as a means of addressing conflicts in relation to territorial problems and natural resources is a key step forward towards a still very new Asia-Pacific order.

#### 4

The Kuala Lumpur Declaration achieving by end 2015 the process of creation of the ASEAN community composed by three communities (political-security, economic, and socio-cultural) is a very relevant step ahead for the 'hard core' integration. The new emphasis on the cultural community deserves special attention. On the one hand, the past instrumental manipulation of 'Asian values' by the Malaysian prime minister, Mahathir, is no longer as relevant as it used to be; on the other hand, the cultural and cognitive dimension of integration is increasingly necessary to strengthen 'a common identity' [Acharya 2012]. Australia and New Zealand are members of 'ASEAN + Six' and main trade partners, but are excluded from the ASEAN hard core, because they are ethnically Europeans. 'Forging a common identity and building a caring and sharing society' looks to be a third approach, between those based on mere economic liberalization and an exclusive identity. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint (2009) looked as very ambitious, but was confirmed in 2015. The Socio-Cultural Community project includes both bottom-up support to youth, women, the elderly, etc., networking, and increasing national policy coordination of welfare, labour, health, education, science, environmental policies, and disaster relief. Finally, South-East Asian games

and general cooperation in sport have a highly symbolic role, enhancing feelings of common belonging. These functional and ideational dynamics of integration are positively interplaying with the proliferating ASEAN external political ties.

The political and security community is still framed by the sacred principle of 'no-interference'. However, it starts to be questioned. Although no consensus yet exists on a shared and pooled sovereignty regime, not only did de facto mutual interference increase during the two main political crises of 1998–1999 in Indonesia and Malaysia, but also various member States openly proposed, on several occasions, a 'strengthened interaction' that goes beyond post-colonial approaches to sovereignty. The emergent prudent interference in the domestic affairs of other member States was justified in the name of the relevant external implications of migration flows or national crises like those of Indonesia (difficult post-Suharto transition era; East Timor crisis, and so on) and Malaysia (limited democracy, human rights, and media freedom), and Thailand's frequent coups *d'état*.

Democratic consolidation and stronger institutional cooperation were also limited by the authoritarian nature and fragilities of many of the national regimes during the previous decades. For instance, ASEAN supported Corazon Aquino's campaign in 1987 (Philippines) and criticized Hun Sen's coup *d'état* in Cambodia. Considering the Myanmar situation, and comparing the roles of ASEAN, the UN, the EU, and the US, the enhanced efficiency of ASEAN peer pressure, underpinned by the concrete progress accomplished between 2012 and 2015, is evident. However, in spite of the various democratization waves, we cannot say that new regionalism in this area does imply generalized domestic democratization, at least so far. The weight of a very diverse colonial past, the legacy of the Cold War, the cultural, religious, and linguistic diversities, and the various relationship between State and society are together making the combination of democratization and regional cooperation more difficult than elsewhere, even when implementing common policies such as the fight



against air pollution, infectious diseases, pirates, terrorism, and criminality. However, the troika created by the Bangkok Summit of 2000 to address regional security problems was able to evolve into the current security community. The process of building legitimate internal problem-solving authorities will continue, even if in a very gradual and prudent way. New issues are on the agenda: economic and monetary cooperation, follow-up of the quasi-constitutional ASEAN Charter, and the three communities.

ASEAN has been able to enlarge the regional association to ten MS and to take further relevant steps towards a more comprehensive cooperation agenda, as it did in 2015 and confirmed in its summits of 2016 and 2017. The first of the main challenges for ASEAN is how to combine its deepening internal cooperation with the differentiated model of concentric circles, so as to contribute to a more stable regional order. The previously inward-looking and defensive approach of ASEAN States is evolving towards a more strategic view on the one hand, strengthening the ASEAN + Three and ASEAN + Six with the RCEP, where ASEAN is in the driving seat in the context of the Asiaization of regional cooperation and the global instability provoked by unilateral actors like the North Korean Dictator and the unpredictable new US President D. Trump.

What about the role of the three giants in the region, Japan, India, and China? For the first time in Asian–Pacific history, the challenge is that the economic and political competitive influences of China, India, and Japan are increasing simultaneously. The economic giant and technological leader Japan, beyond imperial historical legacies on the one hand, and its post-WWII inattention to regional policy on the other, is likely to become a more dynamic factor within ASEAN + Three and ASEAN + Six<sup>9</sup>, as, notably, it was after the Tokyo Declaration of 2003 and during the Hatoyama

premiership. Prime Minister Abe has eventually accepted to strengthen the trilateral cooperation in North-East Asia (NEA), ASEAN + Three, and RCEP. An enlarged regional cooperation process is in progress in East Asia, and South-East Asia and North-East Asia are joining the process, at economic and security levels, but also moving to parallel forms of cooperation<sup>10</sup>. Along with historical links, economic interdependence and the troubles of the WTO Development Doha Round (DDR) help to explain the Japanese will become a strong partner of Asia-Pacific countries. Japan failed to become the leader in monetary cooperation in the context of Chang Mai Initiative in 2000–2003, but is a huge source of public financing and private investments, which fund the fight against poverty, recovery from natural disasters, and so on, for the whole area.

India, a member of ASEAN + Six, may apply for ASEAN membership because it cannot be encapsulated solely within the South Asian framework in the context of the SAARC paralysis. However, to include India as a full member and not only as an observer is not an easy issue for ASEAN: sensitive internal balances could be troubled by the size, traditions, and interests of India.

Regarding China, even if increasingly assertive about its national interests and role, it looks committed to multilateral cooperation, including at regional level, in different areas, from FTA to security issues. Bringing both Japan and China into multilateral global and regional frameworks is crucial for the security of the region. In this respect, ASEAN + Three is a successful circle: the Trilateral Conference in Seoul (October 2015) was able to set a wide common agenda, including annual summits between the prime ministers and leaders of China, South Korea, and Japan. This event is a new branch of the evolution of the concentric circles architecture surrounding ASEAN. The changing ways of China's peaceful raising pro-

<sup>9</sup> Japan's decision to come back to the Asian Pacific regional cooperation framework which will be its largest export market (even before the American one) made Japan a supporter of the 'Chang Mai initiative', ASEAN + Three, East Asian summits, RCEP, and the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) [Fort and Webber 2006].

<sup>10</sup> The merging of the NEA security complex with South-East Asia security complex [Buzan et al. 2003] is questioned by the partially independent development of the trilateral cooperation regime in NEA.

cess and its distinctive multilateral approach are among the main challenges for ASEAN. Could, for instance, the Chinese initiative of the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB)<sup>11</sup> not only avert an open conflict both with the Asian Development Bank and with WB/IMF, but also support new complementarities between the regional and the global financial governance? Competition increasingly matters, even if, much to the dismay of realist approaches, the competitive scenario is multilateral: for example, the RCEP – supported by ASEAN + Six – and the AIIB, are exercises in ‘competitive regime creation’ [Morse, Keohane 2015], reflecting a multilaterally promoted regionalism, rather than mere traditional power politics.

Even more than in the past, the ASEAN institutional settlement will be a crucial variable as it adapts to internal differentiation, but also becomes strong and consistent enough to help to bring the whole region towards enhanced political convergence. In 1992, liberal economic dynamics were the way to revive the old ASEAN. Consolidating its regional polity and a large regional security architecture, in the context of the flourishing distinctive forms of institutionalization of the transnational life, even if more conditioned than before by geopolitical factors, are the two main challenges ahead, not only to remain in the driving seat within Asia-Pacific regionalism, but also to avoid competition for resources exacerbating internal disputes that could lead to downgrading or disintegration of ASEAN<sup>12</sup>.

The third main challenge is to combine regional/interregional ties with global governance, which entails rethinking the relationship with the EU and the US, as well as with international organizations. A proactive role, beyond the Asia-Pacific, was increasingly part of the dynamism of ASEAN, through participation in the G20 (Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Canada, China, France, Germany, India,

Indonesia, Italy, Japan, South Korea, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, UK, US, and the EU) and UN consultancy bodies and interregional arrangements: the APEC process, the bi-regional dialogues with MERCOSUR, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), and Russia, as well as the more than 20-year-old Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Regarding Europe, the process leading to the ASEM interregional dialogue started in 1994 (the first Singapore project and the Karlsruhe Summit) under the convergent pressure of strategic interests and private lobbying [Fitriani 2014; Ruhland 1999]. Mutual expectations and perceptions evolve over time: similarities and dissimilarities in the respective understandings of European and Asian partners have been elaborated. ASEAN has three main goals: to achieve an improved international status, to get better access to the EU market, and to attract European investments. Both ASEAN and the EU want to complete a kind of global governance trade triangle (Europe, Asia, and US), diversify markets, and enhance their respective bargaining power with the US.

These shared interests explain why the first ASEM Summit, at heads-of-State level (Bangkok 1996), succeeded by setting a regular interregional agenda. Further biannual summits, which took place in London (1998), Seoul (2000), Copenhagen (2002), Hanoi (2004), Helsinki (2006), Beijing (2008), Brussels (2010), Vientiane (2012), and Milan (2014), and the 11th in 2016 (15–16 July, in Ulaanbaatar, Mongolia) managed to widen the membership to include Russia and other MS, thereby broadening the triple agenda of economic cooperation, political dialogue, and cultural dialogue. However, ASEM still pays a high price for its marginal role during the financial crisis of the late 1990s and, during the recent global crisis, several EU Member States favoured renationalization of their relations with South-East Asian countries. However, notwith-

<sup>11</sup> The AIIB, which sits in Beijing and has a Chinese president, was founded in 2015 by 57 regional and non-regional MSs (Brazil, South Africa, and some EU countries). It is also the outcome of the Chinese and East Asian dissatisfaction with the Asian Development Bank led by Japan and with the IMF as well as with its failed reform.

<sup>12</sup> [Acharya 2014] underlines that East Asian regionalism is moving forward in somewhat unexpected ways, which entails theoretical implications beyond realism and rational choice institutionalism.

standing the evident limits of the EU achievements in the institutionalization of a relationship still defined as a 'Meeting', both ASEAN and the EU are taking the opportunity to use ASEM as one of the instruments that strengthen their international role within the multipolar world.

The ASEM objectives have been partly implemented through ministerial meetings, business forums, managerial and youth leader meetings, and the Asia–Europe Foundation (ASEF). Of course, bilateral trade arrangements and 'strategic partnerships' with individual powers (the EU with Japan in 1991, China in 2003, and India in 2004, and a partnership and cooperation agreement (PCA) with Indonesia in 2014) interplay with hybrid interregionalism in a complex way<sup>13</sup>, and are more relevant and substantial. Both the EU and ASEAN are interested in improving self-legitimizing bloc-to-bloc trade relations: ASEAN is the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe, after the US and China, with more than 190 billion in trade in goods and services in 2014. The question is whether the partners will take stock of the current shift towards bilateralism and use the trade relations with the EU (FTAs, with Singapore in 2012 and with Vietnam in 2015, and with ongoing negotiations with Malaysia and Thailand) as leverage for a resumption of interregional ASEAN-EU trade talks. The ASEAN Kuala Lumpur Summit of 2015, which was to provide an input to RCEP (by the end of 2015), may indirectly foster new EU-ASEAN trade negotiations, which entail evident political implications for global governance.

The business community and civil society are crucial driving forces for interregionalism: however, the obstacles are the very limited people-to-people dialogue, the weak interparliamentary cooperation, and the limits of ASEF as a framework for transnational relations at the level of citizen advocacy networks. Actors of civil society may help by pressing the Asian authoritarian or post-authoritarian regimes and addressing the

controversial human rights issues, which, however, have improved in recent years.

As far as the future is concerned, ASEAN and the EU are both politically interested in framing the existing multipolar power structure by multilateral cooperation in the widening the plurality of actors, the containing of great power politics, and the limiting of fragmentation. The main challenge is a political one: notwithstanding the weakness of the EU as a security provider, to what extent is the EU-ASEAN economic/political partnership able to evolve towards a building block for global governance? The EU and ASEAN signed their inaugural interregional cooperation agreement in 1975. One of the options on the table in 2016 is upgrading their trade partnership as both a trade policy and a strategic political decision. The EU approach is changing: it started with an assertive 'normative power' vision regarding developing countries, which was combined with its interests to be involved in a strategic area of the planet while strengthening regional cooperation. More recently, the EU looks to be moving forward beyond old asymmetrical patterns and seeking cooperation on an equal basis, and combining block-to-block partnership with bilateralism and a joint commitment to dealing with global challenges [EU Commission, 2015b; Teló et al. 2015].

Regarding the US, the relationship with ASEAN countries is framed by APEC, and several bilateral arrangements. The US influence in the region is still crucial: it pushes free trade while rebalancing China (the 'Asian pivot', as Obama called it), offers military cooperation, and campaigns for democratization and the rule of law. Contrary to GW Bush, the Obama Administration has generally been in favour of multilateralism; however, the new initiative of an exclusive TPP (2015) objectively is a divisive factor in ASEAN between insiders and outsiders and appears to the Chinese as destabilizing because it is shifting from cooperation to containment<sup>14</sup>.

<sup>13</sup> For this conceptualization, see [Teló, Fawcett, Ponajert 2015; Teló, Regionalism in Hard Times, Routledge 2016].

<sup>14</sup> See the new US military commitments: sending troops to Darwin, strengthening the alliance with Japan, cooperating with India, and providing several of China's neighbours with security guarantees.

If ASEAN is interested in reviving global multilateralism, in spite of the abovementioned interregionalist and regionalist projects, maybe an eventual Free Trade Area of the Asia Pacific (FTAAP) (within APEC) could build up an umbrella bringing together TPP and RCEP and foster a global WTO regulation of all these complex issues. In that case, ASEAN could again play a driving and bridging role. Second, a stronger ASEM might underpin a new collective global leadership in the making and help revive global multilateralism. These are not only trade or inter-institutional issues, or adaptations of world politics and world society to regionalism, but are also political challenges for the decades ahead. Given the increasing economic and trade weight of this region, the construction of peace within the emergent multipolar world has, in the Asia-Pacific, one of its main laboratories and, in the ASEAN dynamics, the innovative driver for a regionalized/globalized institutionalization of international relations.

\* \* \*

ASEAN is a model for regional cooperation in the world and even the EU and the

Eurasian community have something to learn from the South East Asian experience. The ASEAN way avoided on the one hand the standing European conflict between intergovernmental and community methods and was able to show the huge potential of various intergovernmental networking in supporting further progresses in deepening and widening regional cooperation. On the other hand, the ASEAN way is a bottom-up method excluding hierarchical decision making and a single country supremacy. Second lesson, the practice of concentric circles proved flexible enough and able of combining political leadership of the hard core (ASEAN centrality) with openness and inclusiveness, at various degrees of near and far partners. The challenges ahead are internal fragmentation and, in particular, the potentially dividing pressure of security challenges in the neighbouring area, often deepened by power politics of great global actors like China and USA. Deepening the security cooperation within the hard core, combined with a better link with the UN, and a mutual support with other regional organizations like the EU, may help ASEAN by coping with these challenges.

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