

## ***The East Asian Summit –towards ever closer cooperation? -- an EU perspective***

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The European Union has numerous strategic interests in East, South East and South Asia -- these relate firstly to the trade and investment engagements which European corporations have made in this region, secondly to the opportunity of cooperation in issues of global governance and sustainability and thirdly, to the effects and repercussions of security developments within Asia on Europe. The European Union's interests in the East Asian summit process may be said to be informed by an understanding of the increasingly important role which this region may be expected to play on the global economic and political scenes.

A world with three major regions seems to be forming. In the western hemisphere we have the United States, increasingly closely linked to Latin America through the FTAA and other cooperation initiatives. Also in the west, we find the European Union, recently expanded dramatically to its East and South-East and to include Bulgaria and Romania by 2008 and presumably Turkey by 2015-2020. And in the East, we may observe a number of less well-defined processes of regional cooperation, noticeably, the ASEAN, ASEAN-plus-3-plus-1, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and a host of other inter-regional and bilateral processes. The East Asian summit will be an important milestone to assess whether East Asia will be able to cooperate and integrate effectively, or alternatively whether these attempts at forming an Asian Union a-la Europe will be slow and ineffectual, with the outcomes characterised by shallow integration.

The European Union has identified 'effective multilateralism' as the defining and determining feature of its external relations strategy. It primarily seeks to project 'soft power' in Asia, but understands that in the final instance soft power will need to be backed up by 'hard power' capabilities. It is taking steps to improve its projection as a coherent and responsible player on the global scene, although it must be acknowledged that the French and Dutch referenda, voting negative on the EU constitutional treaty, were a setback to this process.

The East Asia Summit may be the determining event towards an increasingly fast process of integration of the East Asia region. Significant obstacles exist, amongst which the imperative need for Japan and China to develop a 'power-sharing' duopoly of regional leadership. Here European formulae, such as adopted in the Nice-treaty, are not likely to have much relevance. But the European experience of coming to terms with the past (especially in Germany) may be of relevance. In the broader picture, it is desirable for the EU to contribute to the emergence of an 'open regionalism' in East Asia, embedding the protectionist tendencies into an effective multilateralism.

*Note: The views and opinions expressed are strictly those of the speaker and may in no way be attributed to the European Institute for Asian Studies, Brussels nor to its supporting institutions of the European Union.*