

Summary of Sessions and Commentary

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1. There was a considerable degree of pessimism expressed in the course of these meetings, in both the papers presented and the questions and comments from the audience. This pessimism had several dimensions:

- " pessimism concerning the internal cohesion and dynamics of ASEAN and its effectiveness as a regional integration project (Rüland, Yeo Lay Hwee, Pongsudhirak)
- " pessimism concerning the role of the ASEAN Secretariat and the refusal of the members to grant it sufficient resources and autonomy to play a meaningful role in regional integration (Rüland, Yeo Lay Hwee, Pongsudhirak)
- " pessimism concerning EU-ASEAN relations, and in particular the failure of the Commission and the member states to take SE Asia seriously in the post Asian crisis period (Rüland, Yeo Lay Hwee, Md. Ridzam, Pongsudhirak)
- " pessimism concerning the willingness of developed countries to liberalize their agricultural sectors and open up trade in key products such as rice to ASEAN members (various)
- " pessimism concerning the prospects for the Doha Round, especially concerning the interests of the developing countries (Md Jawhar Hassan)
- " pessimism concerning the capacity/expertise of ASEAN countries in the Doha negotiating process (Md Jawhar Hassan, Djisman Simandjuntak)

The possible exception to this expressed pessimism lay in the remarks of the WTO Director-General Dr. Supachai Panitchpakdi, who proved more optimistic concerning the interests of the developing countries in the Doha Round.

In view of this pessimism, and the fact that this is a policy dialogue, one might then suggest some general directions worth pursuing so as to overcome the pessimism expressed in the sessions over the past two days.

2. Concerning the ASEAN internal dimension, 'identity formation', the role of the Secretariat, and ASEAN generally 'getting its act together':

Perhaps member states and the Secretariat should think less of 'grand projects' and major ambitions, and more about small, practical steps to be taken to achieve a series of modest, 'integrationist' goals. For example, concerning the Secretariat, thought could be given to how one makes the secretariat more indispensable to the member states. It needs to become the natural meeting place and information exchange for the member states, and the natural place for ironing out conflicts of interest. The wealthier and more developed ASEAN members must take the initiative here. One could also ensure that more sub-national contacts, among sub-national agencies and policy-makers working on co-operative ventures, meet there - so that ASEAN is not just about summit-level contact. There needs to emerge an institutionalised habit of using the secretariat and its good offices for multilateral and bilateral co-operation. The aim is step-by-step to make national affairs also ASEAN affairs - given that it is already recognised that many national problems cannot anyway be resolved only at the national level. There are many unexplored avenues of lower-level co-operation including the domain of civil society, the

social dimension of managing globalization, and intensified co-operation on monetary and trade issues.

3. There were several presentations which emphasised the 'ASEAN way' of quiet, patient diplomacy and the successes which had occurred as a result - for example over East Timor and the current peace process concerning Aceh. The quiet and often indirect approach to even major problems in the region and among members certainly has its merits. But there could also be more frankness and openness about when it does *not* succeed, and may thus be inappropriate to the problems at hand. The ASEAN way should not become a means to sweep difficulties among members states under the carpet and to play to the lowest common denominator in terms of integration - that is no way to build ASEAN. The organisation needs a strong set of normative principles concerning governance, its goals, and the relationship between the governed and those who govern. The Myanmar/Burma issue is the most obvious example here. It is not just a matter of human rights issues, important as these may be, but also that the more legitimate and especially democratic regimes are better at development in the long run. And Myanmar/Burma has a more or less zero record on successful development. The central ASEAN issue is thus about people and regional development prospects for *all* member states. If intra-regional trade is to develop, then the member states must develop, and that means change in Myanmar/Burma.

4. Turning to relations between the EU and ASEAN, Myanmar/Burma should not become a further source of tension between the two. ASEAN will have to accept that for the EU, the situation in Myanmar/Burma is unacceptable, and it *should* be so to the other ASEAN members too. Similar dilemmas were faced, for example, by the Commonwealth of Nations (of which some ASEAN states are members) when it came to South Africa pre-transition, or Pakistan post-coup. Hard decisions need to be taken. But ASEAN and the EU can work together on this: there should develop a 'soft cop' (ASEAN) - 'hard cop' (EU) routine, where in exchange for aid and acceptance as incentives, Myanmar/Burma will need to change, or leave. ASEAN should work with the EU on this point, and not see EU concerns as a source of tension in the relationship.

5. This brings one to the EU-ASEAN relationship on a more general level. Certainly, ASEAN does need to 'get its act together' as discussed above. Furthermore, there was a lot of evidence produced during our discussions that the EU needs to reactivate its interest in the relationship, at the level of the Commission and at the level of the member states. But first and foremost it takes two to co-operate, and that means that they need matters of mutual interest to discuss, and material goals of mutual interest to achieve. One might begin by saying that far too much effort goes into identifying the differences between the two entities, which are rather obvious and in this sense it is not necessary to highlight them constantly. Highlighting difference has become a means to avoid developing the relationship. Mutual interests and goals are rather more likely to arise from a discussion of their similarities.

- " both were born of a fear of war, in a Cold War context, and both see integration as a means for building peaceful relationships in their region
- " and both ASEAN and the EU emerged in a Cold War context, and each is busy absorbing new transition economy member-states with serious development needs into the integration process
- " both share important 'collectivist' or solidarity-oriented values in terms of economic and

social policy, and both see regional integration as a response to the pressures of global economic integration on the policy capacity of the nation-state. Both also share a number of norms and values when it comes to the international system - they stand for quieter, more conciliatory ways of dealing with the new security issues

" in the post-Cold War period, both are seeking to attenuate and to manage the intensity of their relationship with the overwhelmingly powerful United States, in terms of international social justice, the development process, and the new security issues, including the war on terrorism. They are far more likely to achieve this together rather than apart, and should co-ordinate their positions more closely.

Thus there is plenty of room for vision, but vision as *doing* things, implemented in small, practical steps.

6. Finally, to sum up, regional integration is multilateral by nature. Regional organisations are an important embodiment of the multilateral principal, and of co-operative ways of doing things at the global level. In these difficult times and under the shadow of American unilateralism, *someone* needs to stand up for multilateralism. Developing the EU-ASEAN relationship has important demonstrative value for the rest of the international system. But multilateralism is not just about what foreign ministers or heads of state do. The relationship can be built not just through spectacular initiatives, but through a web of lower and high-level contacts based on achieving concrete goals. Better relations are an antidote to the relationship of each with the United States. Those with an interest in multilateralism and who uphold the peaceful values behind the multilateral approach, need to demonstrate that it works, that it solves problems better than military solutions because it prevents conflict from getting to that stage (thus multilateralism *cannot* be a lowest common denominator approach). Norms and values are important to the multilateral approach, and a better ASEAN-EU relationship can demonstrate that there are less aggressive, less unilateral ways to deal with conflicts of interest, even the problems of terrorism and especially, perhaps, the underlying causes of terrorism.