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Current Dynamics and Theoretical Approaches

Yeo Lay Hwee
Lluc López i Vidal

Elisabets, 12 - 08001 Barcelona, España - Tel. (+34) 93 302 6495 - Fax. (+34) 93 302 6495 - info@cidob.org www.cidob.org

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REGIONALISM AND INTERREGIONALISM IN THE ASEM CONTEXT: CURRENT DYNAMICS AND THEORETICAL APPROACHES

Yeo Lay Hwee*

Lluc López i Vidal**

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*Senior Research Fellow, Singapore Institute of International Affairs
& Associate Director, European Union Centre in Singapore
**Political Science Lecturer at the Universitat Oberta de Catalunya
and Universitat Pompeu Fabra

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Regionalism and Interregionalism in ASEM

Yeo Lay Hwee

ASEM was launched in 1996 with a summit in Bangkok that brought together leaders of 10 East Asian states (Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, China, Japan and South Korea) and the 15 EU member states plus the President of the European Commission.

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) was conceived in Singapore as an informal meeting between Asian and European leaders to enable the EU to engage dynamic Asian economies in a wide-ranging dialogue. The early 1990s saw the unilateral liberalization of various Southeast Asian economies and the opening up of the Chinese market. At the same time, the European Union was integrating further with the 1986 Single European Act and the 1992 Maastricht Treaty. There were, therefore, strong economic reasons for the two regions to strengthen dialogue. The EU wanted to partake in the benefits of the strong growth in Asia, and not to lose out to Americans and Japanese. The Asians worried about Fortress Europe with the creation of the Single Market, its focus on Central and Eastern Europe and the internal debates on the Maastricht Treaty. They wanted to be sure that they would not be shut out of Europe. Engaging Europe is also a way of diversifying their economic and foreign policy dependence away from the Americans.

The strategic reason behind ASEM was the concept of closing the triangle – balancing relations and creating strong links between the three engines of growth – America, Europe and East Asia. The argument was that strong transatlantic ties exist between Europe and the US and transpacific ties were also increasingly dense because of APEC and other bilateral relations that exist between the US and its various Asian partners. But ties between Europe and Asia were weak and lacking, and hence the need to have a forum under which linkages can be built and strengthened.

The genesis and development of ASEM (and APEC in the early 1990s) brought forth the serious and intense debates in both academic and policy circles about the state of regionalism in East Asia and the nexus between interregionalism and global order. The numerous theoretical debates in the 1990s focus on how regionalism and interregionalism can be seen as responses to globalisation and on a policy level, debates were on how informal institutions, frameworks and processes such as APEC and ASEM can contribute to multi-level global governance.

Theoretical Underpinnings of Regionalism and Interregionalism

Regionalism and interregionalism are contested concepts.

In this paper, I have embraced an expansive concept of regionalism, not as a mere geographical concept but as one which encompasses three other dimensions as underlined by Richard Stubbs and Geoffrey Underhill. The first dimension concerns the extent to which countries in a definable geographical area have significant historical experiences in common and find themselves facing the same general problems. The second dimension emphasises the extent to which these countries have developed socio-cultural, economic and political linkages that distinguish them from the rest of the community. The third dimension focuses on the extent to which these countries have developed institutions to manage crucial aspects of their collective affairs (Stubbs and Underhill, 1994:331-2).

Regionalism should also be seen as a dynamic process that encompasses different phenomena happening at the various stages of its formation. In this process-oriented concept, the first stage of moving towards a cohesive region is regionalisation. This refers to the growth of integration that is often "undirected", driven by market-based imperatives and not by the conscious policy of the states. During this stage, the state can complement the process when it gets involved in the negotiations of inter-state agreements to facilitate and strengthen the process of market

integration. A further extension of inter-state cooperation can broaden and deepen the process of regionalism. All these processes could be helped if regional awareness, which is the shared perception of belonging to a particular community resting on internal factors such as shared history and culture and external factors such as common threat perceptions, is widespread. At some point, a combination of all these factors – regionalisation, emergence of regional consciousness and regional inter-state cooperation might lead to the formation of a cohesive and consolidated regional entity (Hurrell, 1994:38-45).

Looking at regionalism from the above perspectives, how then can one place interregionalism? One could simply see interregionalism as being relations between two regional entities. However, if one attempts to provide greater nuance, it should also encompass how the two processes of regionalism and interregionalism interact and impact each other, shaping the consciousness and contour of the regions, and influencing the institutional development of an emerging world order.

In this paper, the interregionalism here covers two broad types of relationships. The first type is what would be termed pure interregionalism, which is a group-to-group relationship such as EU-ASEAN, where two defined regional entities interact with each other. The second can be termed 'hybrid' interregionalism (and some analysts use the term "trans-regionalism) such as ASEM, APEC and FEALAC in which the two 'regions' that relate to each other may not be clearly defined. Membership is more diffuse and may not coincide neatly with regional organizations.

Theoretical work on interregionalism is fairly new and sparse as interregionalism is a relatively new phenomenon that followed the rise of the concept of new regionalism in the late 1980s. However, the practice of "interregionalism" can be traced back to the 1970s with Europe's precursor role in establishing group-to-group dialogue. Early studies on interregionalism concentrated on the European Union and its hub-and-spoke system of external relations. Edwards & Regelsberger (eds) book on *Europe's*

Global Links: The European Community and Inter-regional Cooperation (1990) provided a well-informed overview of the EC's group-to-group dialogues.

In examining the trends in EU interregionalism, Vinod Aggarwal and Edward Fogarty (2004) believe that a synthesis of market-driven globalism and politically-driven regionalism and exploring the dynamics of the interplay of market forces and political actors may help explain the evolution and future trends of the EU's inter-regional regimes or cooperation frameworks.

In international relations and diplomacy, the proliferation of inter-regional frameworks in the 1990s is explained by institutionalists as a result of the need to manage the increasingly complex interdependence brought about by globalization. It has the potential to become a new layer in an increasingly differentiated global order. With the emergence of inter-regional dialogues, at least five major policy-making levels can be identified in the international arena – the global, multilateral level (such as UN, WTO); inter-regional dialogues such as APEC and ASEM; regional groupings such as the EU, ASEAN; sub-regional dialogue such as the Greater Mekong subregion; and bilateral relations. All these different layers of interactions in different ways help to manage the complexities of globalization and contribute to the evolution of global governance.

For the realists, interregionalism arises as a reaction to increased regionalism and the fear of 'fortress regions'. Interregionalism is therefore seen as arising from the need to balance regionalism in other regions as well as interregionalism between other regions. Thus to the realists, ASEM is a direct reaction to APEC and APEC in turn was a response to the fear of a fortress Europe and the implications of the Asia-Pacific countries being left out because of NAFTA.

Depending on which school of thought one subscribes to, inter-regional dialogues can serve various functions. For the realists, the primary function of inter-regional dialogues or cooperation frameworks is balancing. Institutionalists on the other hand, highlight the potential

of inter-regional dialogues to serve as rationalisers or agenda-setters in global multilateral forums, and most importantly, their contribution to overall institution-building in an emerging multi-layered system of global governance. Finally, there are also the social constructivists who essentially see inter-regional forums as identity-builders, as they claim that inter-regional dialogues can trigger and stimulate processes of intra-regional coordination and cooperation.

What is the state of development of regionalism and interregionalism in the ASEM process? How much has ASEM as a process and framework contributed to the regionalisation processes in the two regions, Asia and Europe, and as an inter-regional framework, how much has it contributed to the construction of a global order based on the concept of multi-level governance?

Regionalism, Interregionalism, Global Governance and the ASEM Process

ASEM was conceived in the mid-1990s when there was much euphoria about the benefits of globalisation and more optimism with regard to international cooperation. Multilateralism was also seen as the key principle underpinning a new emerging global order that would likely be multi-polar in nature. The economic rise of East Asia and increasing regionalisation was also generating internal debates and external expectations of an emerging East Asian community that would begin to play a more proactive role in shaping the global order. The first attempt to institutionalise East Asian regionalism was the proposal from then Malaysian prime minister Mahathir Mohamad to form an East Asian Economic Grouping (EAEG) comprised exclusively of East Asian economies. However, because of strong opposition from the US and the reluctance of Japan to support this initiative, it was downplayed and reconstituted as a modest East Asian Economic Caucus (EAEC) within the APEC framework.

Despite the above, when ASEM began, it was presented as an inter-governmental, state-to-state forum. However, social constructivists wanted to believe that though officially states participate in an individual capacity in ASEM, in practice they frequently act along regional lines based on existing or incipient collective identities. They therefore view ASEM from the angle of identity-building, particularly for East Asians. ASEM, in their opinion, has helped to construct the notion of an East Asian region through a series of coordinating mechanisms that were needed when East Asians prepare for ASEM meetings. East Asian members were driven to organise themselves on a regional basis by the fact that their counterpart was the most advanced regional grouping in terms of economic and political integration. In turn, EU acceptance and treatment of the East Asian member states as a collective entity has reinforced the conception of East Asia as a region (Gilson and Yeo, 2004: 28-29).

Some also argue that it is not only the East Asians who have used ASEM as an identity-builder. The Europeans are also using ASEM to help in the fostering of a common foreign and security policy and to reinforce a European identity that could be presented to the outside world. The EU, despite its integration, still follows an essentially inter-governmental logic in its Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP). The EU's inter- and trans-regional dialogues could help stimulate greater coordination and cohesion in the EU's CFSP and in fostering an international identity of the EU on the global stage. This identity has often been characterised as unique or *sui generis* and the Union presents itself as a normative power or civilian power. All these terms broadly refer to the EU's distinct foreign policy principles that accept the necessity of cooperation with others in pursuit of international objectives, thus a preference for diplomacy, multilateralism and institutionalised agreements to achieve its foreign policy goals (Smith, 2005:15).

Seen from the perspective of constructivists, ASEM is essentially an instrument for intra-regional integration.

There is no doubt that the preparations for ASEM set off a process of consultation and coordination among the Asian ASEM members who up till then have no forum that linked the Northeast Asians with the Southeast Asians. The Asian ASEM members "coincidentally" constituted the East Asia Economic Grouping (EAEG) that was first mooted by Mahathir back in 1990. Many were hopeful that the ASEM process would help Asia define itself, and that East Asians would establish a greater sense of regional cohesion to enable to play a greater role in the emerging post-Cold War global order. In short, ASEM was "instrumentalised" to portray East Asia as a major region in the triadic relationship between three key engines of growth - North America, West Europe and East Asia - of which East Asia represents a major pole in an emerging multi-polar world.

While initially insisting the ASEM is an essentially inter-governmental, state-to-state forum, over the years, the East Asians have also not objected when the process began to adopt more features of a region-to-region dialogue. The inter-regional or trans-regional dimension of ASEM was particularly pursued by the EU to achieve the objectives of balancing the rise of APEC and to create networks of institutions that would contribute to multilateral and multi-level global governance.

There is also no doubt that regionalism in East Asia did develop in the years from 1996 to the present, but there is no solid proof that ASEM is a major contributing factor. Paradoxically, it was the 1997-98 Asian financial crisis that had the salutary effect of stimulating new thinking on the part of East Asians with regards to regionalism. The crisis demonstrated clearly the interdependencies in the region, and the region's vulnerability to external forces. The realisation that the existing regional cooperation arrangements such as ASEAN and APEC had been unable to make an effective contribution to solving the problem catalysed thinking on the need for other institutional arrangements (Yeo, 2003:109). This gave rise to the ASEAN + 3 process, a forum that brought together Northeast Asian and Southeast Asia.

Similarly, the EU also witnessed a deepening of its integration process as it prepared for a 'big bang' enlargement towards Central and Eastern Europe. The 1997 Amsterdam treaty also made provisions to strengthen the CFSP pillar of the EU, and to ensure greater coherence and consistency of EU foreign policy. Again, this was driven by dynamics not related to the ASEM process.

While East Asia and Europe are growing in importance as they each acquire increasingly a sense of regional identity (more so in the EU than in East Asia), it was unfortunate that the member states of ASEM did not capitalise on this growing trend to develop ASEM into an effective region-to-region dialogue and cooperation framework that would partake in norms setting and regime creation to help shape the international system. While professing the desire to use ASEM to contribute towards multilateralism and global governance, it has not been able to focus efforts and strengthen capacity to do so. Hence, in both political dialogue and economic cooperation, the member states have not been effective in using the ASEM framework to either shape the agenda in WTO or push for reform in multilateral institutions such as the UN, the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) so as to strengthen global governance.

ASEM's relevance to the broader international context has therefore been questioned. ASEM has not been able to enhance the balance of power in the triangle remarkably. Nor has it been successful in coordinating or harmonizing the interests of its partners efficiently vis-à-vis larger international organizations and bodies. The idea of the potential that ASEM could develop into a much more efficient and effective inter-regional dialogue between two distinct entities, Europe represented by the EU and East Asia in the form of the ASEAN + 3 (APT) framework was also dissipated as ASEM enlarges on the Asian side to include India, Pakistan and Mongolia. The Asian side of ASEM has become more diffused – it no longer corresponds to the ASEAN + 3 framework; neither does it correspond to the emerging East Asian Summit that brings together ASEAN + 3 plus India, Australia and New Zealand.

Earlier academic discussions that ASEM could develop into a well-established inter-regional forum with the ability to act as a rationaliser of international relations under conditions of complex interdependence are based on two pre-requisites – first, the Asian component of ASEM must become more integrated to act as a single regional entity and that the European component of ASEM, the EU, must increase its "actorness". The latter is happening with the Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), though many obstacles continue to plague the cohesiveness and actorness of the EU. East Asian integration, however, is in doubt and with the enlargement of ASEM to include India, Pakistan and Mongolia on the Asian side, regional coherence is further diluted.

Can regionalism and interregionalism be "brought back" into the ASEM process and what can member states do to advance these two processes?

Advancing Regionalism and Interregionalism within the ASEM Framework?

To answer the question if regionalism and interregionalism can be advanced through the ASEM framework, first we need to look into regional developments in Asia and the EU.

Regionalism in Asia

The ASEAN + 3 (APT) framework which began in 1997 was the first forum that "formally" linked the 10 countries of Southeast Asia (ASEAN) to the 3 key Northeast Asian economies, China, Japan and Korea. The first meeting took place in 1997 in response to the Asian financial crisis.

The Asian crisis led to intensified efforts by the East Asians to look into more formal economic integration as opposed to the more loose and informal economic interdependence that has existed for years. It

also jolted the East Asians to the reality of the downside of globalization, and to rethink how regional cooperation should be developed to manage both the opportunities and the challenges arising from the increasing pace of globalization. Specifically, the Asian financial crisis served as a kind of catalysis for the formation of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT) process, a forum that brought together Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia.

The first APT informal summit was held at the end of 1997 at the height of the Asian financial crisis. The moves to closer regional cooperation in East Asia were concentrated in the macroeconomic and financial areas, and progress was made in the initial years with a number of currency swap agreements.

While the ASEAN + 3 process was a reaction to the crisis, it was quick to develop into an institutionalised process of meetings and dialogue among the leaders, ministers and senior officials. Cooperation also quickly extended from financial and monetary cooperation to many other areas, and the desire to create an East Asian Free Trade Area (EAFTA) was mapped out in the East Asian Vision Group report commissioned by the South Korean government. All the official rhetoric and various cooperative initiatives generate optimism that East Asia regionalism is on the move and this would eventually lead to the creation of an East Asian community.

There is no doubt that an embryonic form of East Asian regionalism has emerged with the regular ASEAN+3 meetings between leaders, ministers and senior officials. This is based on the shared embrace of economic development (market-driven integration) and the shared sense of vulnerability associated with the processes of globalization and regionalization. Greater regional cooperation is one of the few available instruments with which East Asian states can meet the challenge of globalization. Operating in a regional context, the East Asian states can "asianise" the response to globalization in what they see as a politically viable form. This is in part an insurance policy against another Asian financial crisis. Lacking the capacity to manage the challenge of globali-

zation at the level of nation-state, governments have turned to regionalism as a response (Kim, 2004:61). In short, regionalism was to offer the promise of Asian solutions for Asian problems.

Even before the Asian financial crisis, an emerging "East Asianness" was manifested by a new Asian cultural assertiveness in reaction to the triumphalism of the West. The common ground of opposing Western arrogance and hegemony, and limiting the role of the West, was encouraging a sort of defensive regionalism. The moves towards affirming a regional identity with talks of Asian values can be seen in this light of repudiating Westernisation (Falk, 1995:14).

The optimism surrounding East Asian regionalism at the turn of the 21st Century was, however, tempered by an increasing acrimonious relationship between China and Japan in 2004-2006 because of Japanese Prime Minister's Junichiro Koizumi's repeated visits to the Yasukuni Shrine. The historical reconciliation between these two key East Asian powers that is crucial to the East Asian community-building project seemed far away.

The ASEAN + 3 process, the cornerstone of East Asian regionalism, also started to fray when discussions began in 2004 to transform the said framework into the East Asia Summit, envisaged in the East Asian Vision Group report as the first step towards the long term goal of building an East Asian community.

Some ASEAN leaders believed that community-building could best be advanced through the APT framework, and that the ASEAN + 3 summit could simply be renamed East Asia summit to reflect the strong desire to create an East Asian community. However, regional rivalries and differences, particularly between China and Japan, leading to a more competitive rather than cooperative spirit, resulted in two different visions of the East Asia Summit. Japan wanted an East Asian summit that would include Australia and New Zealand, whereas China felt that the East Asian region has been clearly defined in the EAVG report as comprising ASEAN + 3.

With the two key regional powers unable to agree on the definition of "East Asia", it was left to ASEAN countries to be in the "driver's seat" to decide on the membership for the East Asia Summit (EAS). It was during the ASEAN Foreign Ministers Meeting in April 2005 that the three criteria for participation in EAS were set. These were:

– First, participant countries must sign the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation;
– Second, they must be a formal dialogue partner of ASEAN; and
– Third, they must have substantive cooperative relations with ASEAN.

Australia, New Zealand and India, having fulfilled all the three criteria, were then invited to join the inaugural EAS in December 2005 as full participants. Hence, an EAS comprising ASEAN + 3 + 3 was born.

The discussions over membership of EAS highlighted the realities and reactionary nature of East Asian region-building. It also reflected fundamental differences among East Asian countries with regards to the content and end-goals of regionalism in East Asia.

Economic linkages, however much they have grown, have yet to overcome problems that are at their root, non-economic in nature. East Asian regionalism will thus continue to be constrained by the lack of historical reconciliation between the two key players, Japan and China, and other political and strategic obstacles. ASEAN has occupied the de facto driving seat of building an East Asian community precisely because of this lack of reconciliation. And yet ASEAN is also struggling to make itself a more integrated and cohesive community. The central problem for region-building, whether in Southeast Asia, or Northeast Asia, and hence for the whole of East Asia is the tension between an essentially Westphalian political culture in the region on the one hand and the strong economic dynamics driven by the forces of globalization.

What the current state of regionalism in East Asia means for the ASEM process is that the expectation that ASEM could develop into an effective inter-regional dialogue would not be materialised as the concept of "East Asia" remains amorphous. The memberships of the various existing regional architectures – the APT and EAS – also do not correspond to the existing Asian members in the ASEM process, complicating thus the process of institution-building and identity-building in East Asia.

Integration in Europe and the EU's international identity

While regionalism in Asia is still at a tentative nascent stage, regional integration in Europe as epitomised by the European Union has gone far ahead. The EU's identity as a distinct regional entity and a community is never in doubt. Its economic prowess and soft power has also been recognised and hence there are great expectations with regards to its global role and responsibilities. Being the world's largest trading entity, the EU's role in global trade policy is undisputed. It is also striking how much influence the EU has attained by its soft power, particularly in its own region, and it is carving out a respectable place for itself as a player in important global initiatives on climate change, environment and energy security. Yet, the reality is that when looking at the EU's common foreign and security policy (CFSP), the lack of a common position vis-à-vis Iraq was a stark reminder of the divergence and differences amongst the member states when it comes to the kind of role that the EU wants to play in the world. Doubts remain on whether the EU is capable of getting their act together when confronted with the questions of identity and interests and how to secure their place and influence in the world.

The EU has attempted to forge an identity based on liberal humanitarian principles by casting itself in the image of a civilian power, but this turned out to be fragile (Peterson & Sjursen, 1998:179). With an enlarged EU stretching from Finland to Cyprus and from Ireland to Romania, the difficulties in conceiving a consistent, cohesive foreign policy, giving cumber-

some decision-making processes, different strategic interests held by its old and new members, and different foreign policy traditions held by big and small member states, cannot be underestimated. While some EU member states may want to play a bigger international role, the reluctance to move beyond the current inter-governmental framework in the CFSP pillar meant that the same methods and institutions used to encourage economic integration are not readily applicable to foreign policy. The EU will therefore continue to impress more in potential than in reality.

The latest Reform Treaty (Treaty of Lisbon) signed in 2007 has suggested some institutional changes to give the EU "a clear voice in relations with its partners worldwide". The key changes in the CFSP pillar is the appointment of a new High Representative for the Union in Foreign Affairs and Security Policy who would also be a Vice-President of the Commission. The High Representative / Vice-President of the Commission will be assisted by the European External Action Service, a joint service staffed by officials from the Council, the Commission and the diplomatic services of the member states. Purportedly, this together with the creation of a permanent post, the President of the European Council for two and a half years period to replace the current system of 6-month rotating presidency, would strengthen coherence in external relations and raise the EU's profile in the world. Part of this equation to make the Union more visible and to strengthen the Union's negotiating power is the recommendation for a single legal personality for the Union.[1]

The idea behind the latest treaty changes in the area of CFSP is to bring together the EU's external policy tools from the different pillars and harness all the different resources to ensure consistency and effectiveness of EU foreign policy. Whether the latest institutional changes will truly transform the CFSP pillar is unclear. Arguably, some scholars see a lack of identity or common interests as a far deeper problem than the weak institutions.

1. http://europa.eu/lisbon_treaty/faq/index_en.htm.

The EU needs to resolve the dilemma of what its common interests are in the ASEM framework, and what kind of role it wants to play within this framework. As Chris Patten noted, "given the sprawling variety of Asia it would be absurd to think of a monolithic EU-Asia relationship, a single policy or approach, equally valid across the whole region" (Dinan, 2005:542). How then do the various EU dialogues with its Asian partners in the form of EU-ASEAN; EU-China; EU-Japan, EU-Korea, EU-India, etc, fit into or interact with the ASEM framework? Would the reforms recommended in the Reform Treaty help the EU to find its footing in ASEM vis-à-vis a grand design of the evaluation about the role that the EU wants to play in the world?

The EU should in theory be in a "stronger" bargaining position by virtue of the fact that it is far more integrated than the "Asian ASEM partners", that it has been the precursor of group-to-group dialogue and purportedly has a common foreign and security policy. However, the reality is that the ambiguous role of ASEM led to institutional confusion and inertia. ASEM is originally conceived as an informal, basically state-to-state forum which should place it under the CFSP pillar and not in the Union's external relations under the Community method managed by the Commission. ASEM thus challenges the division of power among the Union's institutions and hence impact its ability to shape the agenda and steer ASEM towards a more productive dialogue.

Undoubtedly, the value of the dialogue lies in its flexibility. It is a form of structured political relations that can be easily adjusted to the political ends of the EU without creating any substantial political obligation. In short, it is a low cost, low political risk venture. It is also a convenient way to convey political positions the Union has agreed on, and allow the Union to affirm their collective identity. Yet much more could have been achieved if more strategic thought has been put into the process and the institutional confusion sorted out over which pillar ASEM should fall under. The Reform Treaty with its recommendations may help in the latter in better coordination enhancing the role of the Commission and at the same time with greater institutional support from the Council.

EU-Asia Relations and the ASEM Framework

After more than a decade, ASEM remains essentially a loose dialogue forum stuck at the level of information-sharing rather than any substantive cooperation. ASEM leaders during the 2006 ASEM summit in Helsinki reaffirmed the importance of ASEM as a 'multi-faceted dialogue facilitator' and welcomed the role of ASEM as a 'platform for policy development between Asia and Europe' (Chairman Statement of the 6th Asia-Europe Meeting, 2006). In short, there is no strong desire from the ASEM leaders to change the current informal, loose character of ASEM. ASEM will remain as a forum for exchanging views, and concrete cooperation will take place mainly within the other frameworks of EU-East Asia relations. Its ambiguities and amorphous character have also been reinforced with the latest enlargement to include India, Pakistan and Mongolia on the Asian side.

The lack of strategic thinking on the EU side and the lack of unity on the Asian side meant that the ideal of developing ASEM into a more efficient and effective inter-regional dialogue contributing to global governance through norms-setting and regime creation could not be realised.

Given the current situation in the EU and East Asia, it is likely that ASEM will remain essentially as a loose, open forum, and in competition with other bilateral forums such as EU-Japan, EU-China, EU-Korea and EU-ASEAN relations for attention and resources. The EU appeared to have jumped on the bandwagon of "variable geometry" and "a coalition of the willing" approach in international relations and cooperation. Recognizing the great diversity of Asia, and the lack yet of a clear East Asian regional entity it has opted for a flexible, multi-layered strategy to extract the most out its partnerships with the various East Asian countries. The EU's own enlargement and its increased diversity perhaps also facilitated the acceptance of the practicality of such an approach. As for the East Asian countries, such a multi-level and multi-pronged pragmatic approach is certainly not alien to them, and would be happily embraced. The different national interests and the lack of

a distinct pan-East Asian regional entity had meant that the penchant for bilateralism has been the norm rather than the exception. What does this mean for the future of EU-East Asia relations?

There is no doubt that EU-East Asia relations will remain important and continue to strengthen because of growing economic links and increased strategic linkages. In the economic sphere, Asia has recently surpassed the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) to become the EU's main trading partner. Beyond economics, the growing interdependence meant that no global or transnational challenges can be effectively managed without deeper and closer engagement between Asia and Europe.

As EU-Asia relations continue to grow in response to Asia's growing weight in the international system, more thoughts need to be put into evaluating the role that the EU wants to play in Asia. What are the EU's interests, foreign policy objectives and priorities in Asia? How does the EU intend to secure its influence? What are the instruments and resources available to achieve these objectives? How does ASEM then fit into the overall design? In the light of the rather inchoate configuration on the side of 'Asia' in ASEM, it is not likely that much of the "driving" force for the ASEM process will emanate from Asia.

It is perhaps true that once created, international dialogues and forums such as APEC and ASEM will likely continue to exist even if they have outlived their usefulness. Bureaucrats in charge of the process will rather keep these "known" low risk, low cost "ventures" then to risk the "unknown" of doing away with them. Hence, ASEM, despite the lack of concrete achievements, will remain as one of the umpteen forums and dialogues linking the EU and Asia.

The constructive vision of ASEM being an identity-builder in which regional integration is facilitated through interregionalism is hard to achieve within the ASEM framework. However, ASEM could still serve as a rationalizer or agenda-setter in global multilateral forum if leaders are able to capitalise on its mix of partners to focus on those issues that ASEM can value-add vis-à-vis other EU-Asia frameworks.

ASEM and other competing EU-Asia frameworks

ASEM is unlikely to be a key engine in propelling EU-East Asia relations and deepening the engagement. As noted earlier, EU-China partnership is gaining in importance – both strategic and economic. EU-India looks set to rival EU-China relations as the Indian economy continues on its positive trajectory. EU-ASEAN relations are also on an upswing after years of neglect. The latest announcement of the commencement of negotiations for an EU-ASEAN free trade agreement confirmed this trend. EU-South Korea relations also look set to move forward with the proposal for an EU-South Korea free trade agreement. As for EU-Japan relations, though appearing seemingly low-key, remains as an important aspect of EU's links to East Asia. During the 10th EU-Japan Summit held in Brussels in 2002, a ten-year Action Plan for EU-Japan Joint Cooperation was endorsed.

ASEM has grown from a forum of 26 to 45 comprising the 27 EU member states, the Commission, the 10 ASEAN member states, ASEAN Secretariat, China, Japan, South Korea, India, Pakistan and Mongolia. As other dialogue frameworks gather pace, the problem and challenge for ASEM is to provide evidence of what ASEM can do that cannot be done without ASEM or in other forums and existing international organizations. ASEM hence has to take advantage of its "mix" in membership to retain some relevance by focusing on a few niche issues such as:

Climate change and sustainable development

After 12 days of meeting of the parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC) in Bali, no agreement was reached on a post-Kyoto accord to tackle global warming. The EU came to the UNFCCC conference in the hope of securing an agreement (after the Kyoto Protocol expired in 2012) that would mandate much deeper reductions on greenhouse gas emissions. However, industrial nations such as US, Japan and Australia baulked at any mandatory emission cuts that did not

commit emerging economies such as China and India. China and India in the meantime responded that any measures that impinge on their economic development and efforts to lift their people from poverty were unacceptable. While they did inch forward in agreeing for the first time to seek ways to make "measurable, reportable and verifiable" emissions cuts, they showed no signs of agreeing to any mandatory restrictions any time soon. After much wrangling, what was agreed after several tense moments on the last day of the meeting was to fix a 2009 deadline for a new treaty to tackle global warming.

Going forward, the ASEM framework which bring together the EU, China and India, could be a useful forum to explore the issue of climate change and sustainable development to close the gulf between the key players. The ASEM Environmental Ministers meeting could be used to cover important ground in the lead up to the UN meeting in Copenhagen in 2009 to increase the chance of success of future international climate processes to find an acceptable post-Kyoto agreement.

Keeping protectionism at bay – maintaining an open, rules-based trade and investment regime

A number of controversial cross-border deals in 2006 [2] and open concerns expressed over the investments made by Sovereign Wealth Funds

2. In the US for instance, the China National Offshore Oil Corp (CNOOC) was not allowed to buy the oil company Unocal and a deal by a Dubai-based organization to take over from P&O the running of terminal operations at 6 US ports was blocked. In Europe, several proposed deals also ran into trouble – the plan by Italian energy group ENEL to purchase French Suez; a planned merger of German energy and environment giant EON and Spain's Endesa; the global steel giant Mittal's attempt to purchase Luxembourg-based Arcelor, etc are just some examples.

(SWFs) in 2007[3] signalled increasing reservations about globalisation and the fears that economic nationalism and protectionism is fast rearing its ugly head.

The voices of indignation and debates coming out from US and Europe in response to these issues reflected underlying fears and anxieties over the relentless globalisation and economic competition emanating from emerging Asian economies. If the Europeans and Americans allowed economic nationalism to prevail and stepped on the brakes of globalisation, Asia may end up the big loser (Moeller, 2006).

Much need to be done to address the fears and anxieties, and again, ASEM could be a useful forum to seriously discuss these issues to create common understanding to help keep protectionism at bay.

Supporting Myanmar's internal reforms

While Myanmar has always been under the spotlight for its human rights violations, the events in September 2007 focused the world's attention on this rogue regime. The violent crackdown on peaceful protests by monks and ordinary citizens over rising fuel prices drew widespread condemnation and calls on India and China, Myanmar's closest neighbours to exert pressure on Myanmar for some sort of reforms.

China and India are supposed to have most leverage over Myanmar for economic and strategic reasons. While international attention have shifted to other hotspots – Pakistan, Kenya, Kosovo – the ASEM forum could be used to keep up the pressure on Myanmar to undertake step-by-step reforms.

3. A Qatar government fund offered to buy leading British retailer Sainsbury caused an uproar. Concerns were also expressed when China Development Bank together with Singapore's Temasek Holdings took up stakes in Barclays, Britain's third largest bank.

Conclusions

ASEM was launched in an era of optimism with regards to globalisation and international cooperation. Regionalism, interregionalism, multilateralism and global governance were the buzzwords in response to the complexities of growing interdependence as a result of globalisation. ASEM like many other forums and institutions of that era was seen as building blocks for global governance. Neo-liberal institutionalism and social constructivism greatly informed the debates in international relations with regards to the roles of regional organisations and the way regional organisations develop their own external relations through interregionalism.

However, a series of events at the turn of the century – the Asian financial crisis, a spate of violent anti-globalisation demonstrations scuttling the 1999 WTO meeting in Seattle, international terrorism, the events of September 11 leading to the seismic error of the Iraq war, etc – greatly changed the mood. Global institutions, from the WTO to the UN to the IMF, are under stress. Multilateralism as a principled way of conducting relations between states in pursuit of an indivisible goal such as global peace and prosperity (as defined by John Ruggie)[4] is withering away. What we are seeing may be the reversal of the institutional logic of international politics and the comeback of power and national interests as driving forces of state behaviour. Emphasis is shifting to low-intensity cooperation (so called flexible cooperation or variable geometry) which does not add to real solution of global problems, but instead a more shallow and opportunistic cooperation.

In this kind of global climate, what ASEM can achieve is very limited. It will remain a forum for broad dialogue but not an arena for problem-

4. See John Ruggie, "Multilateralism: The Anatomy of an Institution" in Multilateralism Matters: The Theory and Praxis of an Institutional Form, ed. J G Ruggie. New York: Columbia University Press, 1993.

solving. However, with some strategic thinking and clear setting of priorities, it is still possible to capitalise on the dialogue to focus on issues of mutual interest and seek common understanding and positions that may be helpful in supporting some sort of global agenda in addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing all of us.

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The Theoretical Contribution of the Study Of Regionalism and Interregionalism in the ASEM Process

Lluc López i Vidal

The year 2006 saw the tenth anniversary of the first edition of the Eurasian cooperation forum known as the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). ASEM 2 was held in London two years after that first meeting, against the backdrop of an Asian financial crisis and serious doubts regarding the continuity and usefulness of the ASEM process. In spite of the difficulties encountered along the way, this interregional process remains active today. Over the years, it has become a frank, open dialogue between the two continents on topics of common interest.

This article begins with a review of the state of the art in the study of two intrinsically related fields: regionalism and interregionalism. In the first section, I trace the theoretical evolution of the study of what has come to be known as 'old' regionalism. As we shall see, this evolution has been closely linked to the European experience. This explains the changes that have occurred in this field since the 'new' regionalism burst onto the scene. This 'new' regionalism – in essence, much less 'European' – made it possible to create a new analysis framework to explain the phenomenon beyond the confines of Europe.

We introduce our theoretical study of interregional relations in the context of this 'new' regionalism. Based on studies carried out by Jürgen Rüland, Heiner Hänggi, Julie Gilson and others,[1] I explore the most important theoretical questions on the phenomenon of interregional relations. This discussion will help us to evaluate the case study covered in this article: the Asia-Europe Meetings.

1. Other scholars who have published on the topic of interregionalism include Yeo Lay Hwee, Christopher M. Dent, Richard Higgott, Ralf Roloff, Michael Reiterer and David M. Milliot.

In the section on the case study, I discuss the phenomenon of ASEM from three viewpoints. First, I examine the origins and evolution of ASEM. Second, I describe the interregional agreements associated with ASEM. Third, I discuss ASEM's contribution to world governance.

In the final section, I present my conclusions and assessments, in particular regarding the ASEM process and its future evolution, point to areas for further study of Asia-Europe regionalism, and make suggestions for monitoring the ongoing processes.

Regionalism and Interregionalism in the Theory of International Relations

The phenomena of globalisation and regionalism: fragmentation and integration as starting points

Two events of the early 1990s had a profound effect on the configuration of the new international order: the fall of the communist bloc and the creation of an increasingly interconnected and interdependent economy.

After the communist system was dismantled, many authors proclaimed – prematurely – that the resulting new international order would inevitably lead to the convergence of economic, political and social systems, in what one author called 'the end of history' (Fukuyama, 1993). As the decade advanced, however, the expectation that the conflicts of the past would disappear as these models converged began to fade away. Authors such as Huntington began to discuss the possibility of conflicts arising between the planet's various civilisations due to cultural and religious differences, rather than ideological differences (Huntington, 1996). Beyond the controversies stirred up by these books, the events of 2001 confirmed that, even in the new order, dangers and threats would have a greater presence than ever. The recent Iraq War, the ongoing crisis in the Middle East and the nuclear ambitions of Iran and North Korea only serve to corroborate this idea.

However, in addition to the international disorder that resulted from the disintegration of the communist bloc, the acceleration of economic interdependence and the interconnection between the world's various societies have sparked interest in a new phenomenon: globalisation. This process, while not new, is seen by some as proof of the greater integration of the world's economies and the intensification of their links in trade, finance and production. The first consequence of this process was the deterioration of the sovereignty of nation-states as the only entities able to control their respective economies and societies (Baylis and Smith, 2005). Ohmae observed that the nation-state, while continuing to carry out its traditional basic functions of security and diplomacy, is no longer the system's only unit of analysis, since economic activity no longer coincides with the political and cultural landscape (Ohmae in Telò, 2007). According to this reasoning, instead of nation-states, we should be thinking in terms of 'region-states' – that is, new economic spaces with different borders from those of the states (Morata, 2003).

These hyperglobalist arguments have been the target of harsh criticism from globalisation sceptics. According to the critics, globalisation has not eroded the sovereignty of states and, in fact, states remain the main forces that shape the international order (Krasner, 1999). Some authors go even further, claiming that the phenomenon of globalisation has deliberately been exaggerated and that the world is actually less interdependent today than it was in the 19th century (Gilpin, 2002). According to globalisation sceptics, the hyperglobalist arguments should be understood as 'political-ideological' discourse advanced by governments in an attempt to regulate global capitalism rather than as a serious theory on the current situation and trends (Morata, 2003). In other words, the sceptics argue that globalisation represents an ideology that reinforces Western – and, in particular, American – hegemony.

According to Telò, when we talk about globalisation, we must distinguish between the phenomenon as a trend, on the one hand, and a certain type of political project, on the other. In the former case,

globalisation is a catch-all concept used to describe the process of internationalisation and liberalisation among economies that are increasingly interconnected and integrated. In the latter case, globalisation is a political project that promotes certain policies and implies a certain degree of convergence towards values and patterns that are characteristic of Western culture.

The equation is complicated even further by a third trend seen in recent years. The image of the world as a great 'global village' is confronted by what many consider a paradoxical phenomenon: the regionalisation of economies. Contrary to many authors' opinions, these two phenomena are not mutually exclusive, but rather complementary. Indeed, the globalisation process has facilitated the emergence of a new form of world governance, in which states are considered just one of many authorities in a multi-level system in which a broad range of regional projects has emerged (López i Vidal, 2007).

How can we understand these two apparently contradictory phenomena? As suggested by Morata and Etherington, globalisation causes, on the one hand, the *deterritorialisation* of economic, political, social and cultural activities, which take on a global, rather than merely territorial, dimension (Morata and Etherington, 2003). On the other hand, globalisation causes the *reterritorialisation* of economic and political activities, in which new 'economic areas, governance mechanisms and cultural complexes appear at the subnational, regional and supranational scale' (Held in Morata, 2003). These authors suggest that globalisation cannot be fully understood as deterritorialisation without taking into account localisation (i.e. reterritorialisation). The end result, which they call 'glocalisation', is a dual dynamic defined as follows:

The spatial reconfiguration in which, on the one hand, there emerge economic, cultural, political and social flows and networks at the global scale while, on the other hand, certain economic, political and cultural activities are reterritorialised on various spatial scales, from the continental scale (the EU) to the sub-state level (Morata, 2003).

Analyses based on international relations theory have largely neglected the theoretical study of regionalism on the understanding that the state is the main level of analysis in this discipline. In the following sections. Nevertheless, I will approach the study of regionalism from the double perspective proposed by Morata: regional cooperation as part of a product of 'glocalisation', the synthesis of reterritorialisation and deterritorialisation.

Theoretical approaches to regionalism

In the previous section, I discussed the relationship between globalisation and regionalisation and went on to suggest that the latter is not contrary, but in fact complementary, to the former. Neither economic interdependence nor the regionalisation of the economy is a new phenomenon. Why, then, are today's scholars so interested in these topics? How can we explain the re-emergence of regional projects in the 1980s and 1990s? When we talk about regionalisation and regionalism, do we properly understand these concepts?

I will respond to these questions with a theoretical discussion of the various forms of regionalism. As Hurrell notes, although theory is not everything, it does help us to bring to the surface explicit and unquestionable statements regarding regionalism, which sometimes require subsequent revision (Hurrell, 1995). We must begin by defining such elusive concepts as *regionalism*, *regionalisation* and *region*, and by identifying some of the classic categories referenced in the literature on the subject, such as 'old' regionalism, 'new' regionalism and certain characteristics of Asian regionalism.

Definition of regionalism, regionalisation and region

Before embarking on a discussion of regionalism, it is important to remember that many people confuse the concepts of *regionalisation* and *regionalism*, which in fact do not mean exactly the same thing. Authors such

as Hettne, Payne, Gamble and Breslin have stressed the importance of this distinction. Gamble and Payne (1996) identified *regionalism* as 'a state-led or states-led project designed to reorganise a particular regional space along defined economic and political lines'. Under this definition, regionalism is understood as a political project led by states that is intended to organise the world, politically and economically, into regions.

Hveem (2000) defined regionalism as 'the body of ideas promoting an identified geographical or social space as the regional project'. This definition of regionalism reflects three important points: it focuses on a particular geographical area, it involves a regional project that pursues particular objectives, and it implies the creation of institutions. In this sense, regionalism is both a political strategy aimed at certain objectives and the mechanism for achieving those objectives (Spindler, 2002).

The term *regionalisation*, in contrast, is used in the literature to generically describe this complex process of forming regions, regardless of whether it is a political project or a spontaneous process (Hettne, 2005). In this sense, regionalisation must be understood, in keeping with Hurrell's parameters, as an autonomous economic process that leads to greater degrees of economic interdependence in a particular geographical area. It is not a direct product of state policies; rather, the process is being driven by markets, trade and investment flows. Hurrell also noted that this process is, first and foremost, quantifiable and measurable; second, it is not based on a particular policy of any state or states; and third, that regionalisation models do not necessarily need to coincide with state borders.

Some authors have adopted a more constructivist stance, noting that regionalisation is essentially the process of building regions in which ideas, dynamics and means come together to transform a geographical area into a politically constructed community (Neuman in Hettne, 2005).

As we will see later on, the distinction between regionalisation and regionalism is especially important when comparing the cases of Asia and Europe. In contrast to the European strategy of forging regional

cooperation aimed at eventual political integration, East Asia has undergone an integration process that, for the most part, has been led not by governments but by the uncoordinated impact of corporations and investments in the region (Ravenhill in Beeson, 2007).

Finally, we must define what we mean by the term *region*. Introduced by European intellectuals, the concept was originally based on the most 'geographic' sense of the word. Later, however, it came to mean a physical space, occupied by three or more states, in which a common identity and common interests have been established and power has been distributed in a balanced manner (Murillo, 2004). According to this definition, the mere proximity of states is not enough to constitute a region. The United States and Russia share a border, located between Alaska and the east coast of Russia, but the two countries clearly do not constitute a region. Thus, in addition to proximity, the members of a region must share some type of political, linguistic, cultural, religious or economic link.

Some constructivist authors have pointed out that geographical designations of regions, understood in this way, are neither real, natural nor essential. They are 'socially constructed and politically contested and are thus open to change' (Katzenstein, 1997). As we will see later on, the very idea of 'Asia-Pacific' is a good example of the construction of a regional identity for the purpose of achieving particular economic or political results (Beeson, 2007).

Let us consider the notion of *regionness*, proposed by Hettne. In order for a region to be an effective and significant actor, Hettne argues, in addition to geographical proximity, regions must have a certain sense of regional cohesion, which is acquired through a long-term historical process. Hettne defines five levels of *regionness*: a regional space, a translocal social system, an international society, a regional community and a regionally institutionalised polity. This is a process, then, that begins with a natural coincidence – borders – and evolves towards greater social dependence among the various countries, as well as towards a certain

convergence of values and behaviours within the region. At the highest level of *regionness*, a region achieves *de jure* institutionalisation and becomes an actor with a greater capacity for action – that is, greater *actorness*.[2]

The 'old' regionalism: explanatory theories on European integration

Any debate on the concept of regionalism is intimately linked to the process of European regional construction, which is a historic example of the highest degree of cooperation among states: integration. It is no surprise that most of the literature refers to the first wave of regionalism as 'old' regionalism.[3] Let us now discuss how this first wave has affected the theories formulated on this topic.

After the Second World War, the world was divided into two conflicting blocs, realism became the predominant paradigm of international relations theory, and David Mitrany observed that some of the basic functions of the state – such as ensuring security and welfare – had been gradually transferred to supranational organisations. This transfer progressively increased the level of interdependence among states, and as a result, armed conflict between states became an increasingly remote possibility (Morata, 1998). The final objective of supranational

2. *Actorness* and *presence* have been called the two essential qualities required to be an international actor (Hill, 1993). These two concepts, used most notably in discussions of the nature of the EU, have extended into the discourse on other regional entities. *Actorness* is defined as an entity's capacity to act in the international system, and *presence* is defined as the growing role of an organisation that is not a state but which nonetheless is visible on the international stage. In order for an actor to have presence, it must have both organisational structures and legitimacy in the international sphere (Ginsberg, 1999).
3. Some authors instead identify three waves of regionalism. In this scheme, 'old' regionalism is actually the second period, with the first being the interwar period.

organisations was to achieve world peace. Mitrany advocated limiting their power and ensuring their functional and technical nature.[4] The creation of the European Coal and Steel Community (ECSC) and, later, the European Economic Community (EEC) are examples of the functional nature of regional cooperation organisations. The central idea of Mitrany's *functionalist theories* is a clear break from the realist paradigm – that is, a break from the idea that the international system is based solely on competition between states and that conflict is a dominant element of international relations (López i Vidal, 2003).

Ernst Haas was the first person to cast doubt on Mitrany's functionalist assertion that integration must take place in the economic, rather than political, realm. Unlike the functionalists, the *neofunctionalists* believed that high levels of economic interdependence would lead to greater political integration. The 'spillover effect'[5] – widely discussed in the literature – was the name given to the contagion-type mechanism by which economic integration leads to political integration.

Morata explained that neofunctionalism stresses the process (progressive integration) rather than the objective (the creation of a federation). In this process, supranational organisations created to deal with issues of common interest, such as coal and steel, sometimes end up taking on political functions, such as security and defence. Haas's ideas were used by neofunctionalists to try to apply Europe's example to all regional integration processes.

A series of political crises in the 1960s and 1970s, such as the introduction of the unanimity rule in the EEC and the new nationalism

4. Jean Monnet, the first president of the ECSC and a chief architect of European economic unity, adapted Mitrany's functionalist ideas in order to create functional federalism.

5. Rosamond defined the spillover effect as 'The way in which the creation and deepening of integration in one economic sector would create pressures for further economic integration within and beyond that sector, and greater authoritative capacity at the European level.'

of the French president Charles de Gaulle, took the neofunctionalists further and further away from observable reality. With the failure of the European Political Community and European Defence Community proposals, realist authors were proven right when they said that integration could only occur when it was in keeping with the national interest of the states.

Thus, *intergovernmentalist theories* emerged, and their proponents directed fierce criticism at the federal integration model. These authors affirmed that nation-states remained the system's main political unit, despite timid transfers of sovereignty in certain areas. They also denied the existence of the spillover effect described by the neofunctionalists. As noted by Stanley Hoffman, a chief proponent of these theories, states were willing to create supranational organisations to coordinate various economic policies (i.e. low politics) but not to deal with issues such as security and diplomacy (i.e. high politics). In other words, there is, to some degree, a transfer of sovereignty to supranational organisations, but the states ultimately supervise the decisions made by such organisations (López i Vidal, 2002). After the Luxembourg Compromise of 1966 and the strengthening of the Council of Ministers and the Committee of Permanent Representatives (COREPER), the EEC increasingly moved towards a system of intergovernmental cooperation, which served to confirm Hoffman's theories (Morata, 1998).

In the final stage of this first wave of regionalism, which was focused exclusively on Europe, Robert Keohane, one of the most influential authors to have written on the topic, introduced a model known as *neoliberal institutionalism*. Applied to the study of European regional integration, and based on the realist theory of the centrality of states, this model assigns an important role to supranational organisations as agents that generate solutions to different sorts of problems stemming from collective action. Keohane, who accepts the basic ideas behind neorealism, believes that institutions created to solve common problems strengthen, rather than weaken, the role of the states. He sees institu-

tions as instruments that states use to maximise the attainment of their objectives. Thanks to these institutions, Keohane asserts, communication among states is more fluid and information is more transparent. As a result, the perception of mutual threat is reduced and regional cohesion is ultimately reinforced (Keohane, 1977).

Based on this brief review of the various theories on regional integration, it is clear that there are various degrees of integration, ranging from purely interstate cooperation to the integration of a region's macroeconomic policies. Europe has been at the centre of the debate on 'old' regionalism, and its development has enabled the formulation of regional integration theories. Breslin (2002), however, pointed out some of the dangers of focusing too closely on Europe.

First, although the case of Europe is just one of many regional integration processes, it has become a point of reference for evaluating and judging all other processes. This Eurocentric approach is mainly due to the fact that the phenomenon of regionalism was developed in Europe after the Second World War. Second, the European model is treated in the literature as an archetypal case that creates norms and expectations that other cases must strive to emulate (Breslin, 2002) – the implication, of course, being that the European model is *the* universally valid model.

Gamble and Payne criticised the excessive attention paid by regional integration theorists to institutions, on the grounds that it is merely an observation applicable to the European case and not a universal parameter. In fact, Europe seems to be the exception to the rule: elsewhere, regional integration takes place without the creation of large, formal organisations, often through the commercial activity of non-state actors (Gamble and Payne in Breslin, 2007). One good example of this is Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC).

The fact that regional integration theories proved unable to explain the process as it occurred outside of Europe led to the emergence of a literature that came to be known as 'new' regionalism.

'New' regionalism

After a certain degree of paralysis in European integration in the 1970s, the mid 1980s saw the emergence of a new integration process that took place, for the first time, outside of Europe and with a decidedly different dynamic, marking the beginning of a new wave of regionalism.

The inexistence of literature explaining the development of integration processes motivated a large number of scholars – including Gamble, Payne, Fawcett, Mansfield and Hurrell – to study this new phenomenon. In fact, it was Hurrell who coined the term 'new' regionalism',[6] although it had already been used in the UNU/WIDER project on new regionalism. However, as Breslin argued, this concept is more useful as a framework for analysis than as a theory. Without ignoring the European case, it attempts to explain the emergence of the phenomenon outside the confines of the old continent.

'New' regionalism is characterised, first and foremost, by its multidimensional nature. At first, this new swell of regional projects had a marked economic component. The liberalisation of the economies that came together in such projects set this new trend apart from the 'old' regionalism, which was much more protectionist. Little by little, other aspects, in addition to economics, have been incorporated into these projects, including monetary policy and security. In Asia, this multidimensional nature took on added importance as the financial crisis hit. This led to the creation of ASEAN+3 and, later, the East Asia Summit, which includes Australia, New Zealand and India, in addition to all of the ASEAN+3 countries. The East Asia Summit is a forum for dialogue based on the three pillars of ASEM: economics, politics and sociocultural affairs.

6. One of the most frequently cited articles on this topic, published by the *Review of International Studies* (1995), is 'Explaining the Resurgence of Regionalism in World Politics'.

Second, this 'new' regionalism was more flexible and informal, and was eager to leave behind the much more institutionalised structures of Europe's 'old' regionalism. The major actors of Asia wished to avoid institutionalising their regional agreements, thereby avoiding the legal formalism that had characterised Europe and rejecting the notion of a 'Brussels in Asia' (Higgott in Telò, 2007). Instead, 'new' regionalism is characterised by informal rules and consensus-based decision-making processes.

Third, regionalism was originally a phenomenon limited to Northern countries, but from the mid 1980s to the early 1990s, a South-South regionalism began to emerge. Latin America was home to some of the clearest examples, such as Mercosur and the Andean Pact.

Fourth, 'new' regionalism does not deny the pre-eminence of states, but it does give increasingly important roles to other actors in the system. As Hettne pointed out, the analytical focus of 'new' regionalism should include not only states but also non-state actors such as large corporations, business associations and, more generically, civil society. As a result, non-state actors have taken on a more intense role in the complex structure of global governance.

Fifth, this 'new' regionalism – together with the phenomenon of interregionalism, which we will discuss later – has fostered the emergence of a multi-level decision-making structure: sub-state entities, states, regional forums, macro-regions and trans-regional spaces. As a result, in 'new' regionalism, states can form part of several regional agreements at once. In fact, there are now very few countries that do not belong to at least one regional organisation, and most belong to more than one.[7]

Finally, some authors (such as Hurrell and Gilson) have argued that the regionalisation processes of the past few decades have shown a

7. This phenomenon has given rise to a 'spaghetti-bowl effect', as it is known in the literature.

certain identity-based component, sometimes known as a regional conscience or, to use Adler's term, 'cognitive regions'. In other words, the members of a region feel that they belong to a community with common history, culture, religion or traditions.

Interregionalism in the new global architecture

As we have seen in the previous section, regionalism is a process in which states with a certain degree of geographical proximity take steps towards regional cooperation as a means of addressing challenges and problems in a multi-level system of global governance. New regional organisations of this sort have proliferated in recent years, especially after the downfall of the bipolar world order. Hettne referred to this new wave as 'second-generation regionalism'. In this 'neo-post-Westphalian' world, regions are not so much 'stealing' sovereignty from states as they are acquiring greater internal unity and cohesion. This has resulted in a greater capacity for action in a variety of contexts. This greater internal cohesion (*regionness*) and ability to influence the environment (*actorness*) have led to the need for interaction between regions. Thus, interregionalism has become more than just a theoretical concept associated mainly with the 'triad'.[8] Some regions, such as the EU, ASEAN and Mercosur, have now begun to establish foreign relations with other regions. In the literature, this is known as interregional relations or 'third-generation regionalism' (Söderbaum and Langenhove, 2006).

The rise of interregionalism means two things for international relations theory. First, in a discipline strongly marked by realist and neorealist approaches, interregionalism has attracted the interest of

8. Interregional relations originated in the US-EEC-Japan triad. These three economic centres of the capitalist bloc maintained relations with one another for many years. This led to the creation of international forums such as the G7.

scholars because it is an instrument that counterbalances the domination of certain regional groups. The literature is replete with the idea that interregional forums serve to establish strategic alliances between countries with selfish interests and thus form blocs that compete with one another. According to Link, such forums foster cooperative competition among regions and between major regional powers (Link in Hänggi, 2006).

Second, in the new architecture of global governance, states are no longer the only bodies that interact in the international system. Other actors, such as regions and macroregions, have appeared in the complex network of world relations. As a result, various levels of policy-making can be seen in the international system, such as bilateral, regional, subregional, continental, transregional, multilateral and interregional. As noted by Rüland (Hänggi, Roloff and Rüland, 2006), these levels do not necessarily overlap, but they can be interrelated and interconnected.

Definition of interregionalism

Since interregionalism is still a relatively new area of study in the field of international relations theory, no single plausible definition has been accepted by a large number of academics. International relations scholars hold significant differences of opinion in terms of paradigm, and the definitions of the term *interregionalism* have been heavily influenced by authors' *Weltanschauungen* in this regard. As discussed below, there exists what Hänggi (Hänggi, Roloff and Rüland, 2006) has called a disconcerting variety of interregional forums, following the emergence of new types of forums related to 'new' regionalism. The definition of the concept therefore depends on whether the author in question understands the phenomenon in the broad or narrow sense.

Roloff (Hänggi, Roloff and Rüland, 2006) defined interregionalism as the process of broadening and deepening political, economic and societal interactions, whereas Rüland referred to it as regularised encounters

for sharing information between clearly defined entities that address specific public policies (Rüland, 2002a). Like Hettne, both of these authors view interregionalism as a way of understanding, reordering and reinterpreting the world through the prism of governability.

Aggarwal and Fogarty took a more economy-oriented tack by defining interregionalism as 'the pursuit of formalised intergovernmental relations with respect to commercial relationships across distinct regions' (Aggarwal and Fogarty, 2004b). These authors equate interregionalism with trade agreements between regions, regardless of the degree of internal cohesion within each of the two regions. In this sense, the term refers to a particular economic strategy focused on business communities.

Gilson (2005) provided a bit more insight by defining the phenomenon, in a constructivist manner, as the ongoing reiteration of a series of cognitive, normative and legal conceptions between regions that arise from social interaction and through regional actions. According to this definition, each region is a reflexive agent that interacts with other agents in an intersubjective process.

Some authors consider this definition too constructivist. Nevertheless, I have used it in this paper on the grounds that it is the most plausible, since it challenges the assumption that states are the only actors in the phenomenon and because it recognises that interregionalism can only be explained by considering other factors in addition to material interests.

Types of interregional processes

As I pointed out in an earlier study (López i Vidal, 2007), one problem encountered when dealing with the subject of interregional relations is the difficulty of elaborating a list that encompasses all possible varieties of the phenomenon. Our confusion reaches its peak when we encounter in the literature terms such as 'transregional forums', 'multilateral interregionalism', 'quasi-interregional relations', 'regional bilateralism' and 'mega-regionalism', to name just a few.

In an in-depth study, Hänggi established an initial classification that fully encompassed the very broad range of empirical cases of interregional cooperation processes. Hänggi identified five types of interregional relations, some in the broadest sense of the term and others in a more narrow sense.

As shown in the table below, types 1, 2 and 3 fall within the more narrow definition of interregional relations. Type 1 refers to relations between the members of two consolidated regional organisations – that is, the paradigm of 'old' interregionalism, such as relations between ASEAN and the EU, between the EU and the Rio Group, and between the EU and the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Type 2 refers to relations between a more or less institutionalised regional organisation and a group of states from a particular region that are not necessarily represented by a formal organisation. Examples of this type include the ASEM process, relations between the EU and Africa, and relations between the EU and the African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States (ACP), all of which also fall within the paradigm of 'old' interregionalism. Type 3 refers to relations between two regional groups, neither of which is represented by a regional organisation or forum. Unlike the first two types, this type of relations falls exclusively within the paradigm of 'new' regionalism. The only example in this category is the Forum for East Asia – Latin America Cooperation (FEALAC), whose process is similar to that of ASEM in many respects.

If we broaden our definition, however, we can also consider interregional relations between states, groups of states and regional organisations from two or more regions. The best example of this form of interregionalism – which belongs to the paradigm of 'new' interregionalism – is APEC. As Hänggi noted, megaregional agreements of this sort tend to be dominated by a hegemon, which may use the agreement for anti-regionalist purposes. Many authors have pointed out that the United States has used APEC as a mechanism to prevent Asian countries from forming their own group and thereby dilute any subregional agreements.

Under this broader definition, we can also identify one more category of interregional relations: quasi-interregional relations, conducted by an international organisation or regional group, on the one hand, and a third state, on the other hand. There are many examples of this peculiar type of interregional relations, including relations between the EU and Russia, relations between ASEAN and Japan, relations between the EU and Mexico, and the Ibero-American Summits between Spain/Portugal and Latin America. Agreements of this sort allow a particular state (i.e. 'single power') to independently maintain relations with a region or groups of states, without the involvement of any regional organisations to which it may belong. One example is relations between the EU and Japan. Within organisations such as ASEM and APEC, Japan must compete with the interests of the other members, so it is in the country's interest to maintain direct relations with the EU. In other cases, such as relations between the EU and China, between China and Africa, and between the EU and India, the regional group seeks to present a relatively united front in its relations with an emerging power.

Table 1. Types of institutionalised interregional relations, according to Hänggi

<table>
<tr><th>Type</th><th>Region A</th><th>Region B</th><th colspan="2">Type of interregionalism</th></tr>
<tr><td>1</td><td>Regional organisation</td><td>Regional organisation</td><td rowspan="3">*Interregional* relations (narrow sense)</td><td rowspan="4">*Interregional* relations (broad sense)</td></tr>
<tr><td>2</td><td>Regional organisation</td><td>Regional group</td></tr>
<tr><td>3</td><td>Regional group</td><td>Regional group</td></tr>
<tr><td>4</td><td colspan="2">Group of states from two or more regions</td><td>*Megaregional* relations</td></tr>
<tr><td>5</td><td>Regional organisation/ regional group</td><td>Third country</td><td>*Quasi-interregional* relations</td></tr>
</table>

Table 2. Examples of interregional relations in each of Hänggi's categories

Type	Region A – Region B	Type of interregionalism	
1	EU-ASEAN/Rio Group/Mercosur/ SAARC/ECOWAS ASEAN-Mercosur/ECO/EFTA Andean Community-Mercosur/ CARICOM ECOWAS-Mercosur	*Interregional* relations (narrow sense)	*Interregional* relations (broad sense)
2	ASEM Africa-Europe (Cairo Summit) EU-LAC (Rio Summit) EU-ACP		
3	FEALAC		
4	APEC ARF OSCE IOR-ARC FTAA	*Megaregional* relations	
5	ASEAN-Japan/China/Australia/ South Korea EU-USA/Japan/China/South Korea/Chile/India/Mexico Rio Group-China/Canada/Japan Mercosur-Canada CARICOM-Japan	*Quasi-interregional* relations	

Source: Drawn up by the author based on Hänggi (2006).

The advantage of this classification is that it takes into account both the 'classic' regional relations (i.e. the 'triad') and the relations of 'new' interregionalism, thereby encompassing all existing possibilities. However, some authors, such as Olivet and Rüland, consider this classification too confusing. Rüland is especially critical of types 4 and 5, which he considers dubious cases of interregionalism, since most of the parties involved belong to a clearly identifiable regional organisation.

Rüland prefers to divide interregionalism into two subgroups: biregionalism (or interregional bilateralism) and transregionalism. The first

subgroup, biregionalism, consists of cases of group-to-group dialogue between regions that have their own regional processes and which act in a unitary manner. Encounters of this type between two regions occur on a regular basis and are aimed at sharing information on various issues, such as trade, the environment, terrorism, etc. The second subgroup, transregionalism, covers agreements in which the participating members from each region are not fellow members of any regional organisation. As a result, the sense of belonging to that region or macroregion is much more vague, as is the degree of institutionalisation. In forums of this sort, states – even when they participate as members of a particular region – end up acting individually, rather than in their region's interests.

Systemic functions of interregionalism

I wish to address one final theoretical issue: the functions of interregionalism and its effects on the international system. It is important to note that, depending on the paradigm adopted, each author has a different opinion as to which is the most important function of interregionalism. Of the various functions highlighted in the literature, at least six are worth mentioning here.

Firstly, interregional forums can act as a mechanism for *balancing power* among the various powers in the international system. Interregionalism is a powerful weapon that can maintain or change the balance of power, both inside and outside of the 'triad'. Maull and Okfen have noted that, rather than balancing power through military force, interregionalism achieves a sort of institutional balance, in which coalitions of regional actors take action in response to the circumstances of the moment. The fight against terrorism, trade liberalisation, and defence of human rights are examples of issues that may motivate actors in these forums to form coalitions. Rüland and Gilson have gone even further by suggesting that institutional balance is the motivation behind the creation of certain interregional institutions. Indeed, the creation of ASEM was a

direct response to the rise of APEC and the growing influence of Japan and the United States on East Asia, and the creation of APEC itself was a reaction to the success of the European Common Market and the Canada-United States Free Trade Agreement (CUSFTA). Likewise, the initiation of EU-Mercosur relations was a reaction to the United States' plan to create a Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA).

Secondly, small countries with little leverage in interregional forums can participate in *bandwagoning* – that is, they can align themselves with the strongest actor or with a winning coalition. This effect can be seen in one of the EU's strongest motivations for creating ASEM: the huge boom in most of the East Asian economies. Nevertheless, empirical evidence suggests that this type of behaviour is not the most common reaction to interregionalisation processes, as Stephen Walt (1991) theorised in a much more general sense.

The third function is *institution-building*. As liberal authors have noted, when a forum is beginning to take shape, the logical next step is to institutionalise it. The degree of institutionalisation of these processes varies from one empirical case to the next, but it is clear that this new wave of interregionalism tends towards 'soft institutionalisation' and 'soft law'. In other words, these processes have a low degree of institutionalisation and are based on non-binding rules (Hänggi, Higgott and Rüland, 2006). Moreover, in processes of this type, subsidiary institutions such as ministerial meetings, working groups and 'epistemic communities' are especially important.

Fourthly, interregional forums have a *rationalising* effect, because they act as 'clearing houses' for the vast majority of the actors, policies and interests involved in global institutions. Most multilateral forums – notably the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the institutions of the UN – deal with political, economic or trade-related issues, so we can expect decision-making processes to become increasingly complex. These forums have occasionally made it possible for parties to reach a pre-agreement on an issue – such as the liberalisation of a particular

economic sector – and then go to the appropriate forum for multilateral negotiations with a common position. The fifth function of interregionalism – which is related to rationalisation – is to *set the agenda* for discussion in other multilateral forums. Interregional forums can reduce the 'bottleneck effect' in multilateral negotiations by allowing the various parties to discuss their interests beforehand.

In the constructivist paradigm of international relations, the sixth and final function of interregionalism is *identity-building*. Many authors consider that interregional cooperation is one of the consequences of previous interactions and experiences within a region. Interregionalism therefore helps in the construction of identities, which increases intraregional coherence. Interregional forums promote the formation of collective identities, in which 'we-ness' and 'other-ness' help to galvanise regional solidarity on the basis of shared norms (López i Vidal, 2007).

ASEM: The Missing Link

Asia-Europe Meetings: Eurasian cooperation and dialogue

The previous section provided a theoretical analysis of globalisation and regionalism, two of the most widely studied phenomena of international relations in recent years. After defining *regionalism*, *regionalisation* and *region*, I explained how 'old' regionalism has become identified with European integration. I showed how the various theoretical perspectives on the first wave of regionalism (i.e. functionalism, neofunctionalism and neoliberal institutionalism) were formulated based on the European experience, with little regard for how things were done outside Europe. In the 1980s and early 1990s – coinciding with the changes brought about in the international system in 1989 – a new wave of regionalism arose, for the first time, outside Europe, especially in Asia. This multifaceted 'new' regionalism, which involved a wide variety of actors and interaction levels, led to the identification of a new trend in the theory

of regionalism: interregional relations. This phenomenon, discussed at length in the previous section, is partially a product of the dense web of foreign relations of a European Union that is increasingly interested in dealing with regions.

This section will discuss one of the most surprising and novel cases of this dense network of interregional relations: the Asia-Europe Meetings. This is an informal dialogue process, with a low degree of institutionalisation, between the EU member states on the one hand, and the ASEAN members plus China, Japan, South Korea and, recently, Mongolia, India and Pakistan on the other. Although it is non-binding, this forum has, for more than a decade, provided an excellent opportunity for Asians and Europeans to cooperate in three main areas: the economy, politics, and sociocultural issues. In this section, I will address the following questions: What is the origin of ASEM? Is it best defined as a transregional process or an interregional process? Or perhaps as a hybrid process? And finally, what are ASEM's functions in global governance?

The origins of ASEM

The ASEM process originated in 1995 with a proposal put forth – as in the case of APEC – by the government of Singapore, which wanted to develop closer ties, through dialogue, with the countries of Europe. The proposal made by the Singaporean Prime Minister Goh Chok Tong aimed to build a bridge between two of the world's three main economic centres. Despite an initially tepid response from Europe, both the European Commission and the leaders of major European countries eventually welcomed the initiative with enthusiasm. There was one fundamental difference between the ASEM proposal and the ongoing EEC-ASEAN dialogues: whereas the latter were based on bilateral relations and focused on cooperation and development aid, the former was based on the principles of equality, mutual respect, and the multidimensionality of the issues to be discussed.

In order to understand the emergence of this Asia-Europe interregional scheme, we must first consider what Dent defined as the 'triadic' political economy – that is, the tripolar world economy formed by the United States, the EU and Japan (Hänggi, Higgott and Rüland, 2006). Although these three poles had already been maintaining relations for many years, it was only after the end of the Cold War and the economic emergence of East Asia (especially China) that they began to interact on a larger scale and develop interregional cooperation processes such as ASEM. While ties became strong on the transatlantic and transpacific sides of the US-EU-East Asia triangle, the 'missing link' was an interregional forum on the Asia-Europe side of the triangle.

However, the creation of ASEM did more than merely complement relations on the least-developed side of the triangle – it also had a major geoeconomic component. On the one hand, in a clear example of bandwagoning behaviour, the EU wanted to get in on the action of the booming Asian economies, whose growth and investment figures were demonstrating the region's economic effervescence. On the other hand, the Asian countries wanted to penetrate the European market and tap into Europe's technological know-how and financial value. In other words, Asia wanted to '[make] sure that its nightmare of a "Fortress Europe" would not turn into reality' (Köllner, 2000).

In addition to these economic interests, the creation of ASEM also involved geopolitical considerations on the part of both regions. After the creation of APEC in 1989, the United States enjoyed access to an invaluable transpacific forum for economic and trade-related cooperation, and the EU eventually began to look upon this privilege with suspicion. The European governments – which had wanted to join APEC as observers but were vetoed by the United States – worried that they were being pushed out of one of the world's major decision-making centres. Many authors therefore interpret the creation of ASEM as a reaction to this unilateralist behaviour on the part of the United States. Indeed, both Europeans and Asians would come to see ASEM as a

source of leverage to ensure that the United States remained committed to multilateralism (Köllner, 2000). In realistic terms, ASEM is the product of a balance of power between the United States and the EU in relation to East Asia.

In addition to the three aforementioned motivations, Gilson identified two other purposes that explain the creation of ASEM: it allows the 'Asian community' to face the forces of globalisation with a cohesive position, and it helps to defuse the Japan-China rivalry by including both countries in the process, which creates a 'security community' (to use the Deutschian term).

The classification of ASEM

Let us now consider the various types of interregional agreements presented in the previous section. Where does ASEM fit in? Is it an interregional or transregional process?

Dent considers ASEM to be transregional, rather than interregional, because it is a common space between and through regions in which the constituent agents operate and maintain economic, political and cultural ties (Dent, 2004). Rüland, Köllner, Higgott, and Aggarwal and Kwei (in Hänggi, Roloff, Rüland) classify it as a transregional forum and a group-to-group dialogue process without common institutions, whose membership is much more diffuse than that of other interregional organisations. Hänggi is much more specific, classifying ASEM as a relationship between a regional organisation (in this case the EU) and a much more weakly defined regional group.

In contrast, Reiterer considers that ASEM is one of the group-to-group regional dialogues – or interregional dialogues – that have formed part of the EU's economic and political strategy since the late 1980s. Specifically, he characterises ASEM as an interregional dialogue to 'manage increasing interdependence, maximise local resources and move towards a more consistent European foreign policy' (Reiterer, 2004).

Gilson takes the constructivist view that ASEM is a group-to-group interregional dialogue that involves two regions that were constructed based on groups with different political and socioeconomic histories. He argues that although the two regions did not exist previously, when the members of ASEM decided to deal with one another on equal terms, they created an interregional region-to-region dialogue (Gilson, 2005).

Whatever definition we adopt, we cannot deny that the ASEM process consists of, on the one hand, a regional organisation (the EU), and on the other hand, a group of states that participate in various overlapping regional forums such as APEC and, more recently, FEALAC. This is, indeed, in the words of Breslin, Higgott and Rosamond (2002), a 'complex cocktail of state actors, interstate and global institutions and non-state actors'.

The evolution of ASEM

As noted above, the creation of ASEM began with Singapore's proposal to build a bridge of dialogue between Asia and Europe. The first edition of ASEM, held in Bangkok in March 1996, was very successful. This first meeting covered a wide range of topics, including the economy, trade, science and security. The event opened up channels for interregional dialogue with the goal of strengthening relations and contacts between the two regions, thus improving Asia's knowledge of Europe and vice versa. With the participation of both governments and civil society, ASEM 1 was a great success. As a result, the parties agreed to continue the process at biennial meetings complemented by mechanisms that would monitor the process, such as regular ministers' meetings and Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs).[9]

9. SOMs play an important role in the structure of ASEM. At these meetings, major figures from the governments of the participating countries engage in debate and announce conclusions on possible agreements to be reached at future ministers' meetings. The meeting of foreign affairs ministers is perhaps the SOM where most debate takes place.

The second edition of ASEM took place in London in April 1998, against the backdrop of difficult times in both regions. ASEM 2 served to confirm that the process would indeed continue, but the partner countries were preoccupied with the crippling financial crisis in East Asia. American opposition to the Japanese plan to create an Asian Monetary Fund was seconded by the EU, which preferred to support the measures taken by the International Monetary Fund to stem the crisis. The Asian countries disliked the lack of support for an 'Asian solution' to the crisis, but some authors, such as Gilson and Higgott, have argued that the crisis helped to create a sense of *regionness* in Asia. As suggested by Gilson, 'the "Asian" crisis reinforced the notion [...] that an East Asia region did exist'.

This second meeting, held under such delicate circumstances, also cast doubt on the very notion of the group's neutrality (Gilson, 2005). With the creation of a group of wise men and women known as the Asia-Europe Vision Group, ASEM's agenda shifted from trade-related topics to much deeper subjects, such as human rights, personal freedoms and the controversial issue of Myanmar's membership.

The third edition of ASEM was held in Seoul in October 2000. It was preceded by – and, in the opinion of Aggarwal (2003), eclipsed by – the historic meeting between the two Koreas in June 2000. The Korean summit also created tensions among the European countries regarding how to deal with the North Korean regime. The result was the publication, at ASEM 3, of a declaration of good intentions entitled the 'Seoul Declaration for Peace on the Korean Peninsula'.[10] The 2000 meeting also featured Asia-Europe dialogue on such thorny issues as Timor-Leste, Kosovo, Myanmar's membership and UN reform.

The next edition was held in Copenhagen in September 2002, when the world was still shaken by the attacks of 11 September 2001. As a

10. Available at www.aseminfoboard.org/content/documents/Seoul_Declaration_for_Peace_on_the_Korean_Peninsula.pdf

consequence, the agenda of ASEM 4 focused heavily on security issues, such as the measures that should be taken in the struggle against international terrorism[11] and the need to open up a 'dialogue on cultures and civilisations'.[12] At the fifth edition of ASEM, held in Hanoi in September 2004, the discussions continued to focus on questions of security. ASEM 5 saw a significant enlargement of the forum, with ASEM having taken on the EU's ten new members plus three new Asian partners: Laos, Cambodia and – to the dismay of most of the European foreign affairs ministers – Myanmar. At that meeting, the partners discussed plans to create an 'ASEAN Community' by 2020 and strengthen their collaboration through the ASEAN+3 process (Gilson, 2005).

In September 2006, on the tenth anniversary of the ASEM process, the sixth edition of the meeting was held in Helsinki. The declarations that emerged from that meeting showed just how much ASEM's topics of discussion had broadened over the years. The most important documents were the 'ASEM 6 Declaration on Climate Change' and the 'Declaration on the Future of ASEM', with the latter highlighting the need to reinforce ASEM's institutional mechanisms and improve the organisation's working methods.

ASEM's contribution to global governance

As explained above, ASEM was created in response to the need for a forum for dialogue where heads of state and government from Asia and Europe could hold informal conversations on a variety of topics and

11. See the 'Declaration on Cooperation against International Terrorism', at www.aseminfoboard.org/content/documents/Declaration_on_Cooperation_against_International_Terrorism.pdf
12. See the 'ASEM Declaration on Dialogue among Cultures and Civilisations' at http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/asem/asem5/culture.html

thus overcome the 'missing link' in interregional relations. In the beginning, therefore, ASEM was not conceived as a multilateral mechanism for dispute resolution, nor as a forum where legally binding decisions would be made. It was not even expected to cover security-related topics, since it was not a forum for security cooperation.

In six meetings over the course of a decade, ASEM's role and basic functions have evolved in response to changes in the international system. As noted by Reiterer, ASEM has contributed generously to multi-level governance in international politics by promoting regional, interregional and multilateral dialogue and cooperation. This triple contribution to global governance – defended mainly by neoinstitutionalist authors – is not mutually exclusive with the power-balancing function of the realist school, nor with the region-building function supported by constructivist authors. The following sections will describe ASEM's contributions to global governance in greater detail.

Power-balancing and stabilisation in East Asia

Authors who do not believe that cooperation between actors can be a practice of international relations, since conflict is the main characteristic of such relations. They see ASEM as having balanced power in the US-EU-East Asia triangle. Since neither the Europeans nor the Asians are competing actors in matters of security, both sides are eager to engage in multilateral diplomacy as a means of counterbalancing American unilateralism. As observed by Reiterer (2006), ASEM serves to correct the prevailing perception that, for the purposes of international relations, the West is equivalent to the United States.

However, ASEM not only aims to seek compromise from the United States; it also helps to counterbalance China in one of the world's 'hot spots'. Kang has argued in favour of seeking compromise with China in the East Asian system of relations between powers of different size and importance, on the grounds that it would increase stability (Kang,

2002). This argument implies two very interesting ideas: first, that Asian countries would, to a certain degree, accept the 'prominent role' of China; and second, that the creation of a hierarchical model in Asia would not produce instability, as most realist and liberal authors argue, but instead quite the opposite.

Interregional cooperation and greater *actorness* for the EU

As mentioned above, one of ASEM's most important functions in global governance is to act as an example of interregional relations. The EU is a regional organisation that has achieved a very high degree of integration. It has used interregional dialogue to deal with the growing interdependence of international relations and maximised its foreign-relations resources in order to achieve a more consistent European foreign policy (Yeo, 2004).

The consistency – or inconsistency – of Europe's foreign policy leads us to another issue raised by Reiterer: the EU's visibility in Asian countries. The EU is currently engaged in an internal debate on whether it is capable of channelling its success as a model of regional integration into other areas, such as foreign policy. With disagreements over the wars in Iraq and Lebanon, in addition to the failure of the European Constitutional Treaty, it is unclear whether Europe can develop a consistent foreign policy. As a result, the trend in Europe is similar, in fact, to that seen in Asian countries: bilateralism in foreign relations.

With the ASEM process, however, the EU has been strengthened in its role as a unitary actor with growing visibility and presence, which helps to increase its *actorness* on the world stage. Interregionalism has acted as an intraregional mobilising agent and helped to unify Europe's foreign policy. Indeed, some of the European Commission's most recent documents, such as 'Towards a New Asia Strategy' and 'Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships', show that the EU member states are making an effort to harmonise their interests with respect to Asia.

The promotion of multilateralism

Despite the Asian countries' preference for bilateralism in relations with other actors, ASEM has clearly promoted multilateralism, especially after 9/11. The 'ASEM Declaration on Multilateralism'[13] emphasises ASEM's commitment to multilateralism as the path towards a more just world, where international disputes are resolved through institutions such as the UN and international relations become increasingly democratic.

Beyond the rhetoric of words filled with good intentions, however, the ASEM partners have been unable to forge a common position to take to multilateral organisations such as the WTO and the UN. There are two concepts, defined by Dent, that can help us to more plausibly evaluate ASEM's contribution to effective multilateralism: 'multilateral utility' and 'multilateral deference'. The first concept, multilateral utility, refers to the contribution that interregional forums like ASEM can make towards achieving global governance that can 'foster stability, peace, prosperity and equality in the global system, in partnership with multilateral institutions' (Dent, 2004). In other words, it is the utility of these forums for achieving certain general goals, such as the eradication of poverty, the preservation of the environment, the protection of cultural diversity, respect for human rights and basic freedoms, the fight against terrorism, and other issues that are discussed in global multilateral organisations.

Dent believes that forums like ASEM perform a function that is much less proactive in practice than in theory. Hence, he uses the term 'multilateral deference' rather than 'multilateral utility', because he believes

13. Available on the website of the Japanese Ministry of Foreign Affairs: http://www.mofa.go.jp/policy/economy/asem/asem6/dec.pdf

that such forums merely allow 'pre-discussion of agenda items for forthcoming global-multilateral negotiations' (Dent, 2004). Thus, ASEM's value lies in its function as a 'minilateral forum' – to use Gilson's term – that acts as a clearing house prior to global multilateral meetings.

Institution-building

Many neoliberal authors have argued that cooperation between actors is the key to overcoming the anarchic nature of international relations. Indeed, cooperation allows actors to share information, develop trust in one another and learn to predict each other's behaviour (López i Vidal, 2007). ASEM achieves this through soft institutionalisation – that is, a weak, informal institutional structure. Rüland has explored this topic in an analysis of the reasons for ASEM's weak institutionalisation.

First, ASEM's balancing and bandwagoning function seems incompatible with strong institutionalisation. In an interregional forum of this sort, the coalitions of actors change continually, and a lower degree of institutionalisation means lower readjustment costs. Second, as noted by various neoliberal authors, the degree of institutionalisation depends on the outcome of a cost-benefit analysis. States try to maintain a Pareto-optimal relationship between opportunity cost and the cost of governance (Lake in Rüland, 2002). In the case of ASEM, a lower degree of institutionalisation reduces the costs associated with leaving the organisation and with establishing and maintaining the institutional structure.

The Europeans have always seen this low level of institutionalisation as a weakness of the ASEM process. Based on the experience of EU integration, Europeans tend to believe that the greater the degree of institutionalisation, the greater the chance of success. Asians, on the other hand, hold a very different view. As correctly observed by Breslin, Higgott and Rosamond, the characterisation of Asian regionalism as '"loose" or "informal" reflects a teleological prejudice informed by the

assumption that "progress" in regional organisation is defined in terms of EU-style institutionalisation'.

Identity-building

Finally, we come to one of the most widely discussed functions of interregional forums, an idea advanced by constructivist authors: identity-building. Constructivists understand cooperation from a cognitive perspective – that is, as a positive outcome of interaction between actors. Both Yeo and Gilson have demonstrated that ASEM has contributed to the 'self-identification' of East Asia as a region. Moreover, the interaction between the two regions has entailed an identity-building process based on 'mutual recognition', 'reference' and 'reiteration' (Reiterer, 2005).

Although interregionalism cannot create a region, it can act as an interregional mobilising agent and, in addition to building trust among members, help to develop an Asian consciousness, especially with regard to 'Asian values' and the 'Asian view'. Specifically, Asia's main shared values are the precedence of community well-being over individual rights, the order and harmony of the system, respect for political leaders, loyalty to one's family, and acceptance of highly interventionist bureaucratic regimes in both the economic and social spheres (Golden, 2004).

For Europeans, this identity-building function not only helps to establish a unitary discourse on Asia for the purposes of EU foreign policy,[14] but also makes it possible to adopt a common stance on what the EU considers 'universal values', including good governance, the rule of law, liberal democracy, the market economy, and the perennially controversial topic of human rights.

14. The European Commission documents 'Towards a New Asia Strategy' and 'Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnerships' are available on the official ASEM website: http://ec.europa.eu/external_relations/asem/intro/

Conclusions

The study of regionalism has changed substantially in the past few years. Firstly, international relations scholars of all stripes have grown interested in regional-cooperation relations. Neoliberal authors in particular have traditionally emphasised this topic. Recently, the neoliberal school has come to understand that studies of regionalism are also closely related to central issues such as power dynamics and the formation of alliances in the international system. Secondly, the scope of analysis in regionalism studies has widened to include complementary phenomena such as globalisation and interregionalism. In fact, interregionalism – and in particular, the ASEM process – was one of the phenomena that motivated this study.

One basic objective of this study was to examine the functions that interregional processes perform for their various members. In order to properly address this topic, I adopted a multiple-paradigm perspective and identified six functions: power-balancing, bandwagoning, institution-building, rationalisation, agenda-setting and identity-building. Most authors have emphasised ASEM's power-balancing function: establishing flexible, malleable coalitions when necessary and promoting multipolarism as a response to the unilateralist behaviour of the United States.

This balance of power, however, must not be understood from the classic security standpoint (i.e. domination). Rather, it should be seen as 'institutional balance' or 'soft balance' (Chen, 2000). Even the most powerful states tend to adopt multilateral strategies when other forms of balance (i.e. military force) are inefficient or very expensive. For both Asians and Europeans, therefore, multilateralism is more of a tactical choice than an ideological one.

In my discussion of the functions of interregionalism in the context of ASEM, I also addressed the topic of identity-building. ASEM can contribute to the self-definition of the Asian regional identity (*regionness*), as well as to greater *actorness* for the EU – that is, to greater European

influence in the international system through the promotion of values such as peace, security, democracy and human rights. With regard to the concept of *regionness*, we appear to be stuck in a difficult stage of the process. As discussed above, it was through regional cooperation on issues of common interest that rapprochement was reached by the two great rivals of the European continent. Germany and France overcame their deep-rooted hostility towards one another in a process characterised by marked functionalist dynamics. Today, the Paris-Berlin axis is the motor of Europe and the guarantee that, although there will be hurdles along the way, the EU is a commitment to the future. In Asia, despite the relative convergence of certain 'Asian values', there is no such *entente* between Japan and China. Japan is not Germany; it does not have the same sort of support that Germany enjoys in Europe. Moreover, the level of intra-Asian trade is nowhere near that of the EU, and Asia is involved in competing free-trade projects developed by ASEAN and APEC. As a result, Asia still suffers from a lack of regional awareness, and ASEM has not been able to fill this void.

Institution-building is another function of interregional forums discussed in this paper. I analysed both the 'new' and 'old' regionalisms – linked to the European and Asian experiences, respectively – and pointed out how they differ. European regionalism has been characterised by a high degree of institutionalisation and political will, with the European Commission acting as a spokesperson on behalf of the EU's interests and the European Parliament taking on more and more responsibilities. Asian regionalism, meanwhile, has been extremely informal, based on soft law and promoted mainly by the business community, which has had to pressure the respective governments to undertake greater regional cooperation.

For many authors, the key question is whether greater institutionalisation always leads to greater levels of regional cooperation, as it did in the case of European integration. I believe it is fair to ask whether the institutionalisation of ASEM – that is, the creation of a much more

formal organisational structure, based on hard law – would lead to greater integration between the two regions. The fact that many authors insist on responding 'yes' to this question has only served to make the Asian partners even more reluctant.

The Europeans, lacking the physical means to be a superpower like the United States, had no choice but to create a postmodern state in which sovereignty is shared with other formalised institutions and the use of force and power-balancing are off-limits. Robert Kagan has noted that the Europeans' embrace of multilateralism and trust in international institutions was determined not by a Kantian view of international relations but by the difference in power between the United States and the EU. The Asians clearly see the world as much more Hobbesian than Kantian. As a result, their style of informal multilateralism aims to reaffirm states, rather than take functions away from them. Asia's interest in multilateralism reflects the continent's support for a multipolarism that preserves the status quo of the international system and, specifically, the sovereignty of the states (Fort and Webber, 2006). The Asians prefer to develop a soft multilateralism involving decision-makers, decision-influencers and representatives of civil society (Moon and Andreosso-O'Callaghan, 2005). As noted by Higgott, the characterisation of Asian regionalism as 'loose' or 'informal' implies a teleological prejudice in which 'progress' in regional organisations is defined according to the European model of Cartesian legal formalism. Asia's future is not necessarily Europe's past (Higgott, 1998).

Of course, ASEM faces the risk of losing momentum and ceasing to be a useful instrument for global governance. This has already happened to other processes, including APEC. Despite a generalised belief to the contrary among the political class, a more diversified scope of dialogue between Europeans and Asians increases the probability that ASEM will continue to be useful for its members. Of course, there is a certain amount of disunity with regard to the three pillars of ASEM – economics, politics and sociocultural affairs – but this is precisely where the misconceptions begin. ASEM was never intended to resolve the conflicts

of the international system, but rather to serve as an arena where these issues could be discussed. In any form of cooperation between international actors that aims to be stable and long-term, each party must regularly obtain positive returns that justify its efforts to maintain relations and open up to as many areas for collaboration as possible. Issues that affect all actors in the international system – such as climate change, the situation of human rights in certain countries, the fight against terrorism, and measures to alleviate possible economic and financial crises – must continue to find a place on the ASEM agenda.

Epilogue: Proposals for a Joint Agenda

In this final section, in addition to proposing areas for further study, I will identify theoretical aspects and debates on regionalism and interregionalism that influence the ASEM process.

First, let me point out that the theoretical study of interregionalism is still in its infancy. Despite the recent publication of *Interregionalism and International Relations*, a book edited by Hänggi, Roloff and Rüland, there are still very few academic compilations that address this phenomenon from the standpoint of the social sciences. It is important that ASEM be studied from a comparative-analysis perspective, as well as by theorists who deal with international relations and international political economy. Specifically, we must answer the following questions: What are the pros and cons of greater institutionalisation in ASEM? Considering that European integration has practically eliminated conflict within Europe, how can Asian regionalism help to reduce international conflicts? Under what conditions can regional integration in Asia lead to greater economic development in the area? Is identity a key factor in the success of regional cooperation?

Second, because regionalism has emerged in the South, in addition to cases of South-South interregionalism such as Africa-China relations and FEALAC, studies of interregionalism should incorporate analyses

of this sort. By studying these cases, we will be able to expand this area of analysis, which has traditionally focused on the US-EU-East Asia triad. Scholars should investigate what functions institutions like FEALAC perform for their members, what position the EU and the United States take towards these institutions, and how countries such as China take advantage of their position as emerging powers to emulate the behaviour of other world powers through interregional Africa-China dialogues and thus increase their *actorness*.

Third, as I suggested in a previous study (López i Vidal, 2004), it is interesting to divide analysis of interregional cooperation into two categories: *possibilities* and *proposals*. *Possibilities* aim to define an area of interest – for example, in the political, economic, academic or cultural sphere – where interregional cooperation strategies might be implemented. *Proposals*, in contrast, are more specific, an example being the implementation of strategies aimed at obtaining a desired result from a particular policy.

Fourth, an initiative that deserves maximum attention is the creation of a *Multidisciplinary Observatory for the Study of Interregional Cooperation*. One major precedent in this regard is RASEM, a thematic network dedicated to regionalism studies, which was created by ASEF as part of its ASEM Education Hub and has its secretariat at the CIDOB Foundation (Barcelona, Spain). Using existing resources in Asia and Europe, this Observatory would work to continually monitor all areas of activity of ASEM and other interregional organisations and to detect new forms of interregional relations.

In particular, this Observatory should study the following topics:

- economic-development models,
- transitions to democracy,
- specific sociocultural and educational aspects of the ASEM process,
- governance,
- migrations,
- policies towards ethnic minorities and multiculturalism.

Proposals of this sort fit nicely with the studies currently being done by existing work groups at academic institutions and in public administrations. In order to coordinate these various lines of study, it will be necessary to identify the 'motors of interregional cooperation' – that is, the institutions that can provide knowledge and experience in the promotion of interregional cooperation. This would be a good first step towards the creation of such an Observatory.

List of Main Acronyms

ACP: African, Caribbean and Pacific Group of States
APEC: Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF ASEAN*:* Regional Forum
ASEAN: Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN+3: ASEAN members plus China, Japan and South Korea
ASEM: Asia-Europe Meeting
CARICOM: Caribbean Community Common Market
ECO: Economic Cooperation Organisation
ECOWAS: Economic Community of West African States
EEC: European Economic Community
EFTA: European Free Trade Association
EU: European Union
EU-LAC: European Union-Latin America and Caribbean Summit in Rio
FEALAC: Forum for East Asia – Latin America Cooperation
FTAA: Free Trade Area of the Americas
IOR-ARC: Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation
MERCOSUR: Southern Common Market
SAARC: South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation
WTO: World Trade Organisation

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