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Abstract

By way of interregional cooperation within the overall framework of the ASEM\(^1\) process, the European Union and its member states have projected European soft power to East Asia. \textbf{In doing so, the European Union has facilitated and impacted on processes of East Asian region building thereby enabling not only the increase of Chinese soft power in East Asia but also the coming into existence of Asian soft power.} In contrast to the approach of the US to the rise of China and Asia, the engagement of the European Union with Asia has not resulted in a constraint to the making of Asian Soft Power in the 21st century.

\textbf{The ASEM process constitutes a Euro-Asian soft power approach to global governance.} European and Asian actors project their concepts of soft power, i.e. their respective models of intra-regional cooperation, and commonly define the norms, principles and rules of how to cooperate in a multilateral institution that furthers the formation of a regional actor on the Asian side (ASEAN+3) and an interregional regime (ASEM).

ASEAN countries have successfully coaxed China into processes of East Asian regionalisation and community-building through engaging China in East Asia. Thereby all Asian ASEM participants and their European partners have the opportunity to “balance the influence of Chinese soft power.” Yet, this general assessment needs to be qualified.

On the one hand it would be misleading to analyse the European Union strategy vis-à-vis China in mere “balance of power” terms. Instead of focussing on relative gains, European actors rather think in terms of absolute gains and follow a multilevel engagement policy towards China and the Asian region. Institution building – even when informal in nature and modelled after the so-called Asian way, as it is the case with ASEM, – is the main characteristic of this concept. European actors believe that a soft power approach is a necessary component to regional stability.

On the other hand the ASEM process generates Euro-Asian soft power. Euro-Asian soft power has an internal and an external dimension. Its internal dimension relates to the interaction between the ASEM participants, while the external dimension of Euro-Asian soft power relates to the systemic implications of the ASEM process.

Why have European and Asian state-actors started to develop common soft power capabilities? What are the concepts and interests that guide the projection of European and Asian soft power? What are the structural and ideational constraints to Euro-Asian soft power? What are the consequences of this approach for the involved actors, including the USA? These are among the questions that will be addressed during the lecture. Finally, this lecture will formulate policy recommendations that are directed at the European Union and East Asia.

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1 ASEM (the Asia-Europe Meeting) is an informal process of dialogue and cooperation initiated in 1996 to reflect the new political climate of the 90’s. Now, the twenty five EU Member States, the European Commission and thirteen Asian countries (Brunei, Burma/Myanmar, China, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Malaysia, Laos, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) participate in the process. The ASEM dialogue addresses political, economic and cultural issues, with the objective of strengthening the relationship between our two regions, in a spirit of mutual respect and equal partnership. The Heads of State and Government summits, held every second year, give the overall political impetus to the ASEM process. Foreign Ministers and their senior officials have an overall coordinating role and are assisted by Coordinators. There is also a range of several ministerial and other meetings and activities at the working level.
Profile of Speaker

Dr. Sebastian Bersick is an expert in International Relations specialising in the politics of intra- and inter-regional relations. As Senior Research Fellow, Dr. Bersick heads the European Institute for Asian Studies research department on ‘EU-Asia Inter-Regionalism and New Regionalism in Asia’ as well as the department on ‘Political and Security Developments in Asia’. He also holds the position of co-Editor of the ‘EIAS Briefing Paper’ series, an in-house publication providing in-depth analysis on issues in contemporary European-Asian studies.

Having studied Political Science, Economics, Sociology and Sinology at the University of Cologne and Free University of Berlin, as well as Mandarin at Xiamen University in the PR China, Dr. Bersick went on to receive a PhD in International Relations from Free University of Berlin. His doctoral research, on the politics of inter-regional relations and the ASEM process, was awarded the ‘Ernst-Reuter Preis 2003’ for outstanding doctoral dissertations. He has worked and lectured at the ‘Centre for Chinese and East-Asian Studies’ at the Free University of Berlin and in the Department of Economics at Bremen University of Applied Sciences.

Dr. Bersick has conducted several field studies in Asia and the U.S. and held consultancies on European-Asian relations and US-Asian relations for the German Government, the European Commission and several renowned NGOs, amongst others. He has published extensively on the political and economic aspects of Asian-European Relations, China’s foreign policy and the role of non-state actors in international relations.

Recent work at EIAS includes the European Commission funded “Study on the Economics and Politics of East Asian Cooperation and, in particular, China’s Role in this Process: Challenges and Opportunities for EU Policy” for which Dr. Bersick was a member of the international Core-Team of Experts with key functions in conceptualisation, research, writing and analysis. Additionally, Dr. Bersick is frequently invited to deliver presentations to wide range of international audiences including academics, diplomats, representatives of the business community, think tanks and journalists.

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ABOUT THE ASIA-EUROPE FOUNDATION

In March 1996, fifteen European leaders, ten East Asian leaders and the President of the European Commission convened in Bangkok, Thailand, for the inaugural Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). At this historic ASEM Summit, the leaders from the two continents agreed to forge a comprehensive partnership and strengthen links between the two regions for mutual benefit. The meeting, among other agenda, called for the strengthening of cultural links between Asia and Europe, particularly the fostering of closer people-to-people contacts, which is indispensable to the promotion of greater awareness and understanding between the peoples of both regions at the civil society level.

To carry out the mission set out by the leaders, the ASEM Foreign Ministers Meeting (Singapore) launched the Asia Europe Foundation on 15 February 1997. ASEF’s mission is to promote greater mutual understanding between the peoples of Asia and Europe through closer intellectual, cultural and people-to-people exchanges.

ASEF is funded by voluntary contributions from the 38 governments of the ASEM countries (expanded in 2004 to include all the current European Union and ASEAN members, plus China, Japan and Korea) and the European Commission. Most of the projects are also financially supported by partner institutions and private enterprises. The decision making body of ASEF is the Board of Governors, consisting of 39 high-level individuals nominated by the member governments, yet acting independently. The Board of Governors, which meets twice a year, sets out the policy directions of ASEF.

For further information, please visit http://www.asef.org and http://www.civdialogue.asef.org