Is the EU an Actor in Asia?

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Define Actor

- In official texts the EU portrays itself as an actor, e.g. European Security Strategy, East Asia Policy Guidelines, Strategic Partnerships
- Academic definitions are broad enough to allow the EU to define itself as an actor - ‘main participants/decision-makers in the international system’
- But clearly a different type of actor compared to the US, or indeed ASEAN
- Now undergoing major identity crisis linked to sovereign debt crisis
Types of actor

- The vast majority are nation states (189 at the last count). US is in a class of its own in terms of military power, but this alone has limitations.
- UNSC/P5 - US, China, Russia, France, UK
- G8/G20 : self selecting
- International organisations (UN, IMF, NATO, ECB)
- Large corporations (Walmart, Sony, Google, Siemens)
- Foundations (Gates, Soros - ASEF)
- NGOs (Greenpeace, Amnesty, HRW)
Theories

- Realists – state based approach to IR
- Constructivists – impact of other actors such as multi-nationals, NGOs, regions, pressure groups, bureaucracies, parliaments and even individuals
- EU a sui generis type of actor. Real power in certain areas (trade, agriculture, fisheries, competition, etc); normative power in others (regulatory standards, human rights, ICC).
- Leadership by example – foremost example of sharing sovereignty and regional integration
EU actors

- Different categories of actor depending on the country’s size, military and diplomatic capabilities, experience and interests.
- Big Three - but UK and France different to Germany (Libya)
- Spain (Latin America), Italy (Med), Poland (EP) have regional interests; Nordics strong on HR
- Many varying coalitions depending on the issue
- Vast number of lobbyists, NGOs and world media based in Brussels
EU interest in Asia

- Several Member States long-standing relations with Asia e.g. British and India (and Singapore), France and Vietnam, Dutch and Indonesia, Portugal and Macao, etc.
- But EU only looked to Asia as regional grouping in 1990s with ASEM; then 2001 Communication – very ambitious goals as buoyed by euro and enlargement – followed by 2003 ‘A New Partnership with South-East Asia’ and then development of strategic partnerships.
- 2004 enlargement a set back for engagement with Asia.
- Renewed interest in past couple of years due to European economic crisis.
2001 Communication

- Promoting peace and security in the region
- Increasing trade and investment flows
- Development assistance
- Protecting human rights, spreading democracy, good governance and the rule of law
- Build global partnerships and alliances with Asian countries
- Strengthen the awareness of Europe in Asia and vice versa
2003 update

- Fight against terrorism - impact of 9/11
- Regional stability - worried at rise of China
- Bilateral agreements - recognition of limitation of regional bodies
- New visibility strategy - desire to be recognised
Assessment

- Not very successful
- Little influence on peace and security (Aceh)
- Increased trade and investment would have happened anyway – private business
- Growth main reason for lifting 500m out of poverty
- Little impact on human rights ‘stop preaching’
- Limited success at global partnerships
- Asians know little about EU (except euro/crisis); and Europeans do not consider Asia as a region
EEAS and Asia

*It has sometimes been suggested that even the term “Asia” may be a false concept, bestowing an artificial homogeneity on the vastly diverse economic and political geography of the region. But labels matter less than the reality, which they represent, and it is the reality of Asia which is of essential importance for the EU.*

EU Commission, 2001
EEAS Organisation

- Cathy Ashton, High Rep/VP
- David O’Sullivan, CEO [Gang of Four]
- Viorel Istitioia-Budura, Managing Director
- Gerhard Sabathil, Director (East Asia and Pacific)
- Seamus Gillespie, Acting Director (S and SE Asia)
- Heads of Unit – about six
- Pedro Serrano/ Sem Fabrizi (Herman van Rompuy)
- Inter-service group
- COASIE WG
Strategic Partnerships

- The EU has a penchant for describing its relations with important states as ‘strategic’
- Around 10 such ‘strategic partnerships’ including 4 in Asia – China, India, Japan, Korea
- But the EU has never had a debate about the nature of such partnerships – what does the label involve?
- And in Asia many think that one relationship tends to dwarf the others - China
EU-China

- 1985 Trade and Cooperation Agreement
- Negotiating new PCA – but little progress
- 60 dialogues – often overlap with member states
- High level strategic/economic and trade dialogues
- Annual summits – next on 20 Sept
- Disputes on arms embargo, MES and HR
- Biggest disputes on trade front
- China good at divide and rule
EU-India

- Little recognition of EU outside trade field
- Hoping to sign FTA later this year but doubts as to whether India can deliver
- Despite rhetoric, little cooperation on big political issues as India obsessed about Pakistan – then US and China
- Bilateral relationship with UK still very close
EU-Japan

- 2001 Action Plan conspicuous by lack of action
- Close economic and trade relations – but little cooperation on political side
- Keen to deepen relations, win EU support for their views on East Asia
- Prospect of FTA following scoping exercise but EU sceptical on Japan being able to deliver (TPP = ‘try public procurement’)
EU-Korea

- First significant FTA with Asian country – industry ambivalent about results
- Now seeking to expand cooperative agenda but difficult to identify many areas where both sides can really work together. SK keen for EU to pay more attention to NK (honest broker) but EU not in Six Party Talks
- Green technology priority area
So is the EU an actor now?

- **Trade** – most definitely. Main actor in Doha. FTA with Korea – followed by India, Japan, SE Asia – China?
- **Security** – military no; but EU spends 50% of US defence budget; leads on proliferation talks with Iran; soft security some impact e.g. CSDP missions, maritime security, cyber security, disaster management, pandemics, failed states
- **Energy** - little impact
- **Climate change** – yes, but
- **Terrorism** – little (mainly member states)
Priorities in Asia

- China – China – China
- Impact of economic crisis has increased focus on China – source of investment and export market
- Fighting protectionism
- Dwindling attention to human rights/ Tibet
- Korea/Japan ; mainly economic
- SE Asia – mix of individual deals and some support for ASEAN
New elements

- US wanting to discuss Asia with EU; agreed at last EU-US summit, Clinton/Ashton meeting at ARF
- Japan keen to have greater EU political presence in Asia (to balance China); ditto Korea
- EU now able to join EAS as observer after ASEAN agreed EU membership of TAC
- Trade – four of top ten trade partners in Asia, fastest growing market, over 20% EU exports, rapidly growing two-way FDI
Should the EU and US Cooperate?

- **Pros:** two like-minded actors seeking to promote democracy, human rights, rule of law; useful to coordinate on global issues before tackling China on issues such as SCS and trade, e.g. public procurement

- **Cons:** will appear to China as though EU-US ganging up against Beijing; and EU-US have different interests and approaches on many issues, including trade and climate change as well as terrorism and the ICC
Conclusion - 1

- EU and Asia bound together by trade and global issues
- Relations moved from single issue (trade) towards holistic approach
- Multi-frameworks: ASEM, regions (ASEAN) and bilateral
- Values still area of disagreement but lessening
- Asia’s emphasis on sovereignty and concept of non-interference makes effective collaborative crisis management difficult
Conclusion- 2

- The EU is a sui generis entity and actor on the global stage. Current crisis has had negative impact both in terms of time and resources devoted to foreign policy, and image of EU in the world. How can EU now preach good governance with any credibility?
- But EU still responsible for 23% global GDP and 22% global trade. Main provider of development aid. And euro still second reserve currency. Many useful carrots.
- So EU a diminished but not unimportant actor in Asia, a region in which it is taking increasing interest.