

# Across the Lines of the World State

## The Case of the United Nations

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This article asks how the United Nations (UN) tries to overcome the modern state system and focuses on the most important UN efforts which could potentially situate it as a form of world government. This study's title – which may be read in two contrasting ways – illustrates a certain ambiguity in the UN's efforts. The first reading implies the over-riding and exceeding of the modern state system in order to reach a new political order while the other holds that the new political system to be achieved through UN activities is faraway and that the UN and the new order are separated on different sides of some barrier. By examining the significance of the Euclidean concept of lines in modern Western thinking and reviewing the most common arguments for the world state, it is shown that the UN ultimately operates within a framework of Western modernity and is unable to transcend this limitation. The UN's aspirational move to exceed the modern state system always returns to the categories and ways of thinking which were established alongside that very system.

*Keywords: United Nations, World Ste, Lines, Euclid, Western Modernity the Modern State, Sovereignty*



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### Introduction

The UN has always been connected with aspirations of overcoming the limits of the modern state and the Westphalian state system. Leaving aside the (more or less) persistent view that the world was in need of an organisation with global reach that could transform inter-state re-

lations, which preceded the actual establishment of the UN, a similar intention was strongly articulated shortly after the UN's foundation when the new destructive power of the atomic bomb made scientists and (to a lesser extent) politicians think about the UN as a global controller of force. Such straightforward statements about the creation of a global (quasi-)state from the UN have a negligible presence today, but the UN still aspires to override the limits of the modern system of states.<sup>1</sup> However, despite the ambitions of many politicians and theorists to give the UN the form of a global government, it has never become much more than an international organisation, i.e. an organisation founded on an agreement among sovereign states.<sup>2</sup>

Just as the UN's efforts to become a world government-like organisation are ambiguous, the title of this work may be read in two contrasting ways. The first interpretation suggests the surpassing and exceeding of the modern system of states in the interests of a new political order. The other maintains that the new political order to be reached through UN activities is faraway and that the UN and the new political system are on opposing sides (of some barrier). Helped by a re-examination of both the philosophical meaning of the modern concept of lines (boundaries) and the most important motives for creating the world state, this paper focuses on the UN's attempts to move beyond the modern state system. This research also shows that the UN's long-term efforts to expand its own limits as an organisation established for international politics and become a representative of world politics, persist despite a strong tendency to mask them and not present them explicitly. The aspirational move beyond politics as we know it is connected with not just the redefinition of the UN but also ultimately with the redefinition of the international system and the global level of politics and – most importantly – of where such politics should be located. While international politics suggests two fundamental (and opposite) levels of politics – 1. politics among states and 2. politics within states – world politics presupposes a more global politics that is located in a unified humankind and dissolves the boundaries of nation states. It is not obvious what such a world politics would or should be like.

This study focuses on key UN-related efforts to move beyond international politics and establish itself as an organisation of world politics. In other words, it asks: *how does the UN try to exceed or overcome the modern system of states?* Beyond its explicit concerns, this question

can help us understand what a world politics might mean (and what it could resemble). The explicit concern of the question is the mechanisms which are effective in attempts to exceed or transcend the modern state system. Such mechanisms are necessarily connected with:

1. moving past or crossing over what separates international politics from world politics and
2. movers and/or moments that express the instabilities and imperfections which need to be overcome, as well as ideal points and/or equilibriums which need to be reached.

The former (number 1) relates to the nature of borders or lines, while the latter (number 2) conveys the reasons, motivations and visions for these moves. As such, both numbers 1 and 2 are employed as categories of inquiry. Although number 2 seems far more important for exploring our central question, this work follows-up on a claim made by Walker about the crucial significance of boundaries/borders/lines.<sup>3</sup> In some sense, this work provides a more empirical elaboration of Walker's claim. At this stage, it must be said that since attempts to turn the UN into a global governing body with strong powers have largely been side-lined, this study focuses on the most important current initiatives which are associated with "moving beyond" international politics rather indirectly.

The thinking in this work is stimulated by two (seemingly opposed) positions. The first argues that as long as we continue thinking about politics through the heritage of Western modernity, it is impossible to move beyond the modern state. If we are unable to overcome the modern philosophical foundations of politics, some form of the modern state will constantly re-appear in our thinking.<sup>4</sup> This study is a re-articulation of this position. The second view holds that the world state is inevitable due to the imperfections of the modern state system. This claim is especially represented in the work of Wendt,<sup>5</sup> who makes use of previously influential arguments about the inevitability of the world state.<sup>6</sup> According to the first position, the second view expresses a desire which is inherently built into the modern system of states. Thus, although these two traditions take different stances, they are complementary in some sense.

Wendt introduces the concept of "attractors," which are end-states or ideal states of a social system towards which that system tends to evolve.<sup>7</sup> He argues that the world state is the attractor of the modern state system. For the purposes of this work, I distinguish between this

general attractor (the world state) and specific attractors, which are more concrete reasons/motivations/causes that show why the state system should move towards the world state. In this respect, the most important specific attractors for Wendt (though he does not label them as such) are the universal human community and the world security government. The issue of attractors relates to the second category – number 2 – of our inquiry.

Besides articulating the difficulty of ‘moving beyond,’ Walker offers a view of borders as something essentially problematic.<sup>8</sup> Political science and International Relations (IR) have failed to recognise the importance of the deeper philosophical assumptions on which the current concept of borders is based. According to Walker, modern borders are conceived as Euclidean lines without width, and this then influences the possibilities for movement across borders and (especially) *beyond* them. This study tries to fill a gap in the social science understanding of borders since the common sense view remains that borders do not need to be explained as a political phenomenon and do not help to explain other political phenomena. Surprisingly, this gap is present not only in IR<sup>9</sup> but also in many other social sciences such as sociology and social anthropology.<sup>10</sup> Borders (or lines) are perceived in this paper as an enabling and constraining factor which helps us to interpret and understand the possibilities for moving beyond such borders. This consideration of lines connects with the first category – number 1 – of our inquiry.

The following part provides theoretical background about borders/lines and attractors while at the same time indicating their interconnection. The next two sections each focus on a specific attractor identified by Wendt; they cover the issues of human identity and security. These two chapters offer key examples that illustrate the role of attractors and lines in moving beyond international politics. Although many other concrete cases could be selected, this paper highlights only the most prominent ones.

## Theoretical Background

This section introduces the two main categories through which our central question – the significance of A) borders/lines and B) attractors – is examined in more detail. Walker<sup>11</sup> makes the crucial and, until

now, largely neglected argument that contemporary political thinking about borders (or 'lines,' in his language) tends to conceptualise them as Euclidean lines without width.<sup>12</sup> This conceptualisation leads to the view that there can be no meaning *within* these lines and that they simply and sharply separate political identities, which subsequently have the clear-cut character of "us-them," "here-there." The clear-cut distinction fuses with modern thinking about political identities, as recognised and observed in post-positivist approaches in the social sciences. These approaches show how the structure of primary political identities and affiliations to primary political units (nation states) is built upon an existential ontology of identitarian pluralism which distinguishes between us/me and alterities to the self.<sup>13</sup>

Despite this critical observation, Walker does not elaborate on this issue further or in more empirical terms. If, then, we want to grasp the nature of lines more closely, it is necessary to understand that the Euclidean conception of lines is a substantivist and non-relational one.<sup>14</sup> This can be discerned from the very basic definitions provided by Euclid himself:

A point is that which has no part. A line is breadthless length. The extremities of a line are points. [...] A surface is that which has length and breadth only. The extremities of a surface are lines. [...] A boundary is that which is an extremity of anything.<sup>15</sup>

Lines are extremities, which does not mean that they mark an end beyond which there is nothing, but that they are demarcations of one specific part of space, i.e. that part only and not any other. One's position in any space can always be clearly defined since the space can be described by a coordinate system. Once a line is drawn in a space, that space is divided into two planes from which it follows that the planes cannot overlap and one's position is either "here" or "there." Aristotle worked within this Euclidean tradition when he conceived of the nature of boundaries as lines and wrote of *x*'s position in space: 'the first thing outside of which no part [of *x*] is to be found, and the first thing inside of which every part [of *x*] is to be found.'<sup>16</sup> Because a line is just a series of points which have no spatial size, crossing a line is unproblematic and is not accompanied by any changes in one's own structure or composition (one remains the citizen of a state, a modern political subject). On the other hand, however, this move does mean situating oneself within a different identity (as a citizen of different

state, a different nation). After someone crosses a line, they take on different characteristics and their identity is changed.

This conception of space and lines contrasts with the medieval one which is considered immediately below. Comparing these two models can help us grasp the specificity of the modern version. While the focus on the medieval conception of lines (and space) does not directly support my argument, a short analysis is, thus, useful for heuristic purposes in order to show the particular and contingent character of the modern political conception of lines. This is important since a broad and implicit argument of this study is that we are too embedded in modern schemes of thinking about politics. Although the model discussed here may not have been the only conception of lines in the Middle Ages, it was probably the most important one. According to this medieval concept, the known world (*orbis terrarum*) was bounded by final frontiers that were considered impossible to overcome. As these were the absolute limits of space, there was nothing beyond them – or to be more precise, anything outside this *orbis terrarum* was impossible, false or too absurd to be true. These were the limits of both space and thinking. On the other hand, the space within the *orbis terrarum* was understood as common to the whole of humanity (deemed similar to Christendom in this paradigm) and the *orbis terrarum* was not sharply separated into distinct communities with clear differences from one another.<sup>17</sup>

While this conception of space and frontiers proposed a unified human community (all people were basically thought of as descendants of Adam and Eve and part of the great community of Christ's followers), there was also an awareness of the differences among people living in different geographical regions. The paradigmatic form of travel connected with this medieval conception of space, lines and frontiers was the pilgrimage, which had several expected outcomes. They included the overcoming of prejudices and differences and their absorption or containment in the pilgrim's personality.<sup>18</sup> On one hand, thus, it was impossible to really move beyond the thinkable realm as outlined in the conception of space and frontiers. On the other, there was an option to leave one's particular community or place of living without crossing any strict lines between here-there or us-them, and thus, without losing one's identity but only developing and enhancing it.

Euclidean lines determine a mode of separation not just between states but also between the domestic and the international levels without setting any absolute frontiers. There is always a significant other in relation to the self-identity of a nation or citizen just as there is always something beyond the modern system of states. If a person wants to move from inside (i.e. from the realm of domestic politics) elsewhere, he or she inevitably reaches the realm of international politics since there is no space between the domestic and the international; similarly, there is no grey area located inside the line between the domestic and the international. Thus, the domestic-international division is influenced by the same clear-cut lines.<sup>19</sup> Like the move between the domestic and international realms, the transformation from international to world politics – at least in the modern sense and based on the modern imagination of a global state/government – requires a change through which the international realm must be overcome and a space reached that has a new and clearly distinguished quality.<sup>20</sup> In this sense, clear-cut lines (which establish something new and displace or subsume the previous stage) are also at work between international and world politics. The UN today is an extremely interesting case because it clearly aims to avoid utopian transformations into a world state, now seen as unnecessary and potentially dangerous, and at the same time, it is still trying to fulfil the ambition – set as part of the definition of the UN at the time that it was established – to act as an organisation encompassing the whole of world politics.

According to Wendt, the world state is the attractor of the modern state system, i.e. it is a stage towards which the international system has been evolving.<sup>21</sup> Although this teleological way of thinking is not universally shared, Wendt provides a sound restatement of why we may need a world state and why the modern state system could be heading towards such a state, and captures the reasoning of politicians and academics on this topic. As a general attractor, the world state is connected with three concrete attractors or end-states which are built into modern politics. Although Wendt does not use the term “specific attractor,” it is clear that he distinguishes three logics behind the creation of the world state. I consider “specific attractor” to be a useful label here since it distinguishes the importance and “power” of each logic. Wendt does not think that states will give up their sovereignty automatically, but rather that it is the nature and mechanisms of

the modern international system which will propel them to do so. He mentions three mechanisms: 1) the logic of the market,<sup>22</sup> 2) the struggle for group and individual recognition and 3) the logic of anarchy. Each one has its own respective attractor: 1) the global common market, 2) a global institution which recognises both universal human community and particular identities, 3) a global security institution. In Wendt's eyes, these three mechanisms do not work separately, but each one has the potential to constitute a specific world state-like organisation. As noted, these logics or attractors are very commonly cited in explanations of the suitability, necessity and/or inevitability of the world state by other scholars and politicians. They are also apparent in the UN's own attempts to situate itself as a global governing body. The next two sections of this work focus on the arguments within the UN for a global human community and world security. The issue of markets is not dealt with since it is the least visible in the UN's argumentation.

Attractors and lines are not two separate issues; rather, they work within a specific nexus and influence each other. As long as the goal is to overcome the problems inherently associated with the contemporary state system, including the issues of anarchy and human belonging, and as long as we think about security and identity in modern terms, these attractors determine the possibilities for overcoming the lines of the modern state system and creating some kind of world state as the solution. They demarcate not only the modern system of states, but also the basic nature of the space beyond. Such modern lines both allow for a path beyond the modern state system and constrain the possibilities of that terrain. The modern logic of these lines suggests that something must exist beyond the boundaries of the current state system. This "something" is the world state and not, for example, a configuration of overlapping or multiple spaces (as might be projected, for example, by neo-medievalism). The transport of the main modern visions and motivations for establishing a political organisation occurs along with the move beyond the modern state system. This move is made across modern lines, which do not change the structure of the subject or object (e.g. the issue, problem or theme), but rather situate that subject or object in a different context. Modern arguments for political organisation based on the need for security or the recognition of a sense of belonging (a common humanity or identity) are, thus, carried over into advocacy for the world state. In other words, proponents



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call for the building of the world state along similar lines to the way modern political theory argued for the contemporary sovereign nation state. If, however, these security and recognition arguments are taken seriously, then the modern state should not be the final goal. In order to overcome the modern state system and its difficulties once and for all, we need to move towards a world state (or some similar form) as the “Other” beyond the modern lines of the current state system, and this is so for the same reasons that the modern state and the modern system of states were built.

### Global Humanity and Its Recognition

Some indications that the UN is a representative body of world humanity can be found in the UN Charter though these signs are overshadowed by the understanding of the UN as an international organisation that prevails both generally and in the Charter, which begins with:

We the peoples of the United Nations determined

to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war, which twice in our lifetime has brought untold sorrow to mankind, and  
to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small, and  
to establish conditions under which justice and respect for the obligations arising from treaties and other sources of international law can be maintained, and  
to promote social progress and better standards of life in larger freedom.<sup>23</sup>

The formulation ‘we the peoples’ may imply a world fragmented into particular nations rather than a unified humanity, but the subsequent specification of goals to be achieved by the peoples of the United Nations frames the ‘peoples’ in a different way. The Charter uses terms and sets goals which indicate an indifference to national borders; these include, for example, ‘faith in fundamental human rights,’ which is not only about the human rights that may be guaranteed by a national framework, but also concerns a somehow higher and more general faith in these rights, and ‘succeeding generations,’ a phrase used es-

pecially in connection with humankind (and which helps to suggest an issue for the history of humankind). This language also suggests that the UN might want to work as a guarantor of international law, i.e. by standing above particular states. All this suggests that the phrase 'the peoples' is indifferent to national borders and relates instead to humankind and that the proposed goals cannot be reached through a solely national framework.

The Charter, thus, shows partial awareness of global issues which need to be governed or at least coordinated at a global level. While these signs in the UN Charter are not clear enough to frame the UN unambiguously as an organisation of world politics and a unified world humankind, they are the seeds from which many stronger contemporary portrayals of the UN as a kind of world government grow.<sup>24</sup> It is useful therefore to examine two important strategies which help to present the UN as a world political organisation. The first one locates the UN as the true representative of global civil society<sup>25</sup> while the second relates to the UN through its secretaries-general, who often act as representatives of universal world values. According to the first strategy, the UN creates a concept of "global civil society" that needs to be represented, and it also locates itself as a government-like body in this regard. According to the second, the secretaries-general aim to act as world politicians.

The first discursive strategy does not directly follow up on the signs in the UN Charter though their indirect influence may be suspected. Instead, it focuses on the phenomenon of global civil society (GCS) and the UN as its representative. This strategy treats GCS as something that is obviously present in contemporary politics. It does not offer any lengthy defence of why a truly global civil society should be regarded as an indisputable fact; it is crucial to this reasoning to pretend that the existence of GCS is self-evident. The UN's basic and most fundamental approach to GCS can be succinctly encapsulated in the following quote from the UN's website: 'The United Nations is both a participant in and a witness to an increasingly global civil society.'<sup>26</sup> The objectivisation of GCS as a fact is a result of the way that the UN distances itself from the process of GCS's creation, i.e. by playing the role of witness. The UN does not situate itself as a direct governing body of GCS but rather as an organisation which is helping GCS to develop. This is apparent from the above quote (in which it has the role of a 'participant') as well as

from many other more extensive UN documents and strategies intended to support the development of GCS. It is also worth noting that both the roles in which the UN places itself discursively – as witness and as participant – are often cited in different UN documents.<sup>27</sup> These two roles are then supplemented by a third position, which might be called “leader of the cooperation.” This can be seen in the following statement by Ban Ki-moon which appears as a motto on the UN website:

Our times demand a new definition of leadership – global leadership. They demand a new constellation of international cooperation – governments, civil society and the private sector, working together for a collective global good.<sup>28</sup>

This third role is built on the two previous positions as well as on the UN’s denial that there exists, or might be, any other actor capable of coordinating GCS at global level. The UN constructs itself as the only actor who is able to represent and coordinate GCS while framing the modern state as the proper location where critical political authority should reside. Thus, the UN strikes a balance between international politics (where “proper” state authority belongs) and world politics (where the UN supports the “natural” process of enhancing GCS). This approach is especially obvious in the strategic documents of different agencies and programmes.<sup>29</sup>

While this discursive strategy claims that civil society has overcome national boundaries and needs a helping hand that must come from a “world political organisation,” it is manifestly unwilling to create a link between GCS and the UN as a governing body. Instead, it asserts that the UN should act in a world-oriented manner that has global as well as local reach. Operating at a local level means working in a specific place that belongs to a nation state, however a world organisation addresses local issues independently of the framework of the nation state and the international system. In contrast, local developments are framed by the need to enhance GCS cohesion since these local issues are understood not as national problems but as matters of GCS. In this sense, the lines are crossed into the realm of world politics. Nevertheless, as has been noted, the UN does not want to directly challenge state authority. This is why it does not propose the creation of any new world authority. As long as the UN aims to develop GCS and its world orientation, however, it needs to position itself as an actor which can work at world level. Immediately upon establishing itself as a player

in world politics, the UN rhetorically returns proper authority to the nation state. While modern sovereignty remains based on the 'society – political authority' relationship<sup>30</sup> and the main referent of modern sovereignty is "the people,"<sup>31</sup> the acknowledgement of society as global creates an attractor in the need for a globally operating authority encompassing the global and world-wide nature of society. Society's move "across the lines" (beyond national borders) compels a similar journey which should be made by the political authority. The UN's effort to balance international with world politics connects to a series of moves from international to world politics and back again.

The second main discursive strategy, which is far more straightforward, relates to norm entrepreneurship and the activities of the secretaries-general. Here it is useful to note that although (nearly) all secretaries-general have repeatedly related their authority to tasks specified in the UN Charter, i.e. to their bureaucratic position,<sup>32</sup> from the very beginning of the existence of this office, they have aimed to increase their influence along with the importance of their post and the range of their political powers. Instead of being mere bureaucrats, as defined in the UN Charter, they tend very often to act as political representatives; they present themselves quite frequently as politicians who stand for universal interests and world values in contrast to the particular self-interest of national leaders.<sup>33</sup> Their self-promotion as politicians whose interests are universal is also connected to their norm entrepreneurship. Rushton thoroughly examines the promotion of democracy by the former UN secretary-general Boutros-Ghali.<sup>34</sup>

The advancing of democracy in this case was situated in – and defined through – the context of other norms such as development, peace and human rights which should help to change democracy into an inherently global issue. Boutros-Ghali's 'Agenda for Peace' portrays the secretary-general as a world politician who – with the help of other global institutions such as the World Court – is working globally for peace and democratic dialogue.<sup>35</sup> Similar attempts to frame democracy and peace can be found in the views of (former) Secretary-General Kofi Annan,<sup>36</sup> who suggested that the world is facing new challenges which cannot be addressed through the old sovereignty framework. In fact, the old sovereignty system is regarded as an obstacle to finding new solutions. This creates the need for further coordination and decision-making in the framework of the UN Security Council. Apart from

the causes of democracy and peace/security, the norm entrepreneurship of Boutros-Ghali and Annan also entails efforts portray themselves as spokespersons of and for global humanity, which connects with the previously examined discursive strategy. Similar attempts can be seen in the activities of many other secretaries-general.<sup>37</sup>

All these norm entrepreneurship activities and initiatives of secretaries-general push certain topics from their original domestic location (democracy) or international placement (security, human community) to a level beyond the international. This “promotion” to a higher level includes two related restatements. The first one claims that issues like democracy, human community and security are primarily embedded in a world (and not in any national) framework; in other words, their nature is global or universal. The second re-articulation points out that these issues should be solved by establishing an environment like the domestic one at global level through the secretary-general as a world politician, the World Court as a tool for overseeing world democracy and the Security Council as a decision-making body for security concerns. The solution by its very nature rests on a) an analogy with the domestic (even if the environment more closely resembles a confederation of states whose interests are coordinated by several higher institutions) and b) a move from the small to the large. This move from the small (the nation state) to the large (federation- or confederation-like institutions beyond states) presupposes 1) clear lines dividing the state and the modern state system on the one hand, and world politics (the world state) on the other hand and 2) the transporting of domestic logic to global issues across these clear lines.

## World Security

This section focuses on the UN’s attempts to serve as a world security organisation. These efforts are best summarised and expressed in the concept/principle of “Responsibility to Protect” (R2P), which has recently been developed to theoretically justify, politically legitimise and practically guide such measures. While this may seem obvious, it is worth noting that R2P is not an exception to the UN’s approach to military engagement but rather it follows from previous UN military (peace-keeping/peace-building) missions and humanitarian interventions. It may be regarded as a concentrated expression of prevailing

views on security within the UN. R2P's indirect precursor was Annan's evaluation of the role of sovereignty in contemporary security affairs.<sup>38</sup> Annan expressed R2P's core claim in his argument that in an emerging humanitarian catastrophe where a large number of people inside a state are at serious risk of suffering or being killed, the international community – represented primarily by the UN – should act to protect these endangered people even if this means violating national borders. As the leader of the international community in such cases, the UN, he claimed, should act 'in defence of our common humanity' since 'humanity is, after all, indivisible.'<sup>39</sup> Following-up on Annan's argument, R2P establishes the principles under which the international community has a responsibility to intervene and protect citizens from mass atrocities where their own nation state has failed to do so.<sup>40</sup>

This conceptual basis for waging military actions, thus, presupposes that at certain times, security cannot be guaranteed via the traditional framework of the modern state system. At these specific moments, states are neither the main referential objects nor the main subjects (actors) of security. To the contrary, the people become the main referential object whose security should be provided by the international community with the UN as its leader. The role of the UN here is not to monopolise the legitimate use of violence or to establish a world army but rather to be able to mobilise the international community in order to defend people in a nation state. The people inside that state are not defended primarily due to their citizenship rights – R2P is rather indifferent to these kinds of rights – but rather by virtue of the fact that they are humans and belong to a common humanity.<sup>41</sup> According to the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) report, which first developed the R2P concept, describes it in most detail and also defines its basic meaning (subject to later revisions), R2P interventions are justifiable under certain conditions; one of these is the "just cause" situation of 'serious and irreparable harm occurring to human beings.'<sup>42</sup> This motivation clearly shows disrespect for the traditional schema of the modern state system.

At these specific moments, security should be provided through a world politics framework while the traditional logic of the modern state system is put aside. These are exceptional instances which might possibly be compared with Carl Schmitt's exemption for cases when a world authority declares the need to provide security via a different

mechanism and political logic. The aim of R2P, however, is not to establish a world authority which could declare exceptions as it wishes, thereby formulating a new kind of world political authority; it is rather to institutionalise the world political framework as an exceptional means of providing security within the existing system of the UN, current international law and modern states, and to connect this with the proper form of state authority. After such an exception arises and the humanitarian crisis is solved, the political framework should revert from this exception for world politics to its normal state. This “normal” state is twofold. Firstly, it is the state of international politics where proper political authority is vested in the nation state (and not the UN). Second, it is the framework in which the proper form (or domestic regime) of nation states is established. In other words, although it might seem like the exception describes some ultimate form of authority and politics as occurs in Schmitt’s political theory, in fact it co-defines and re-affirms international politics.

As Weber observed,<sup>43</sup> humanitarian interventions work to establish the proper state of authority, which is specified by the Western liberal ‘standard of civilization.’<sup>44</sup> Weber’s argument is also valid for R2P. The initial ICISS report on R2P did not understand sovereignty and human rights-based intervention as contradictory concepts but rather complementary ones.<sup>45</sup> The final form of R2P was agreed at the 2005 World Summit, which recognised that:

[e]ach individual State has the responsibility to protect its populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. This responsibility entails the prevention of such crimes, including their incitement, through appropriate and necessary means. We accept that responsibility and will act in accordance with it. The international community should, as appropriate, encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility and support the United Nations in establishing an early warning capability.<sup>46</sup>

These words show clearly that R2P is reconstructing an image of rightful state authority and actions (‘encourage and help States to exercise this responsibility’); according to R2P, this embraces certain duties (i.e. prevention of criminal acts including genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity). The ultimate aim under R2P is not to carry out interventions, but to define proper author-

ity and enforce and supply it when it fails. As both Reus-Smit and Weber remind us, sovereignty has never been a self-referential norm.<sup>47</sup> In this case, R2P helps to co-define sovereignty and establish its referents. This all means that R2P fundamentally works in the framework of the modern sovereign state and state system.

*Aleš Karmazin*

The UN and other defenders of R2P argue for the complementarity of R2P as a tool for providing security, and traditional international security mechanisms as another means to reach the same end. This shows that R2P is connected with the assumption of repeated movements across state borders. (In some cases, states will respect traditional “Westphalian” sovereignty and use established mechanisms such as ensuring the balance of power and diplomatic power relations to manage their international relations; at other times, borders can or even must be legitimately crossed in order to protect humanity.) Similar repeated movements are presumed across the lines between international politics and world politics. These transitions from one mode to another are seen as unproblematic, and the possibility of repeated movement across the lines from “here” to “there” and back again is presumed. The nature of the lines is truly Euclidean in these cases since they do not preclude these shifts. Contrarily, Euclidean lines make these moves easier since actors passing across the lines are not confronted with lines of any width. In other words, there is nothing within the lines which would hamper their movement.

## Conclusion

Several attempts to move from international politics to world politics are under way in the UN today. The mechanisms for these moves work through what has been called the lines-attractors nexus. The nature of Euclidean lines creates an opportunity to move beyond these same lines; they are not final frontiers, but demarcations between two different spaces that do not preclude the option of crossing from one to another. The mechanism of the attractors is, in turn, based on the possibility of moving towards an end-state or equilibrium.

We can draw some specific conclusions from or in connection with this nexus:

*First* – the UN fundamentally operates within and re-affirms the two distinct political spaces (imaginaries) of international and world poli-



tics. Some of the main modern motivations and visions for organising politics and creating the state, i.e. the need for security and for the recognition of identity, are carried over into the UN's attempts to serve as a world political organisation. The UN's move towards world politics occurs across modern lines which do not change the structure of issues/problems/themes but only situate them in a different context. The UN's actions in the sphere of world politics are motivated by the same reasons which modern political theory invoked to establish the sovereign nation state.

*Second* – as is obvious, the UN's shift towards world politics is propelled by two traditional specific attractors, namely the issues of human community/belonging and security. This has been pointed out by Wendt and many other authors before him since both these issues and the need for their resolution seem to stem from the modern state system. In contrast to many other more simplistic visions of the world state and world cosmopolitanism, there is a clear inclination here towards a highly sophisticated understanding of what world politics means and when and how this can be reached. The UN's efforts rely on the elaboration of the highly theoretical concepts of R2P, global civil society, changes in sovereignty and possibly several others, and the actual shift from international to world politics based on these concepts also involves highly complex reasoning. R2P, for example, sets out in detail the conditions when "Westphalian" borders can be suspended and how this action should be justified theoretically.

*Third* – there is also great wariness and fear about the world state as an absolute Leviathan; efforts are evidently being made to avoid utopianism, which has been discredited due to previous failures to establish a world political organisation (like the League of Nations). This attempt to eschew the utopianism of the world state is perhaps the most important reason for the sophisticated reworking of world politics in UN rhetoric (using theoretical concepts such as R2P, GCS and changes to sovereignty). The function of world politics here is to articulate a world of better political relations (based on genuine awareness of common humanity rather than the motivations of particular interests) without falling prey to the trap of utopianism.

*Fourth* – there is an observable reliance on domestic analogies and solutions as well as categories derived or exported from the nation state (e.g. civil society → global civil society, world courts, depictions of the secretary general as the head of, or a spokesperson for, world politics),

and this facilitates movement beyond the modern state system. The fundamental shift from international to world politics, thus, depends on quite a simple move from small to large. This is the case despite the mentioned reluctance of the UN to create (world) state-like solutions. This “masked” small-large move is enabled by the modern character of lines and space, which assumes that transporting something across the lines means establishing its identical reflection in another plane. That reflection is then described by the same coordinates. This movement does not seem problematic since during the actual crossing of the lines, objects/subjects are not confronted with anything of meaning (the lines lack width and cannot possess any meaning) which could change the identity of objects/subjects.

*Finally* – the UN’s endeavours are not as straightforward as Wendt’s teleological movement towards a final goal. The UN relies quite often on the achievement of a balance between international and world politics. What is striking about the UN’s efforts is not the balance, however, so much as the basing of its world politics proposals on several moves from international to world politics and back again in order to reach that balance. This type of movement towards world politics requires and works through repeated alternation between international and world politics and a recurring crossing of the lines. Modern lines create a necessary background for this mode of operation since the repeated transport of meaning, objects and subjects across the lines from one plane (or space or realm) to another is mechanical to some extent. The movement across these lines, which establish different planes with different identities, changes the identity of subjects/objects, but it does not alter their structure since the lines do not exert any force (or contain any meaning) which could do so.



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# Interregional and EU–ASEAN Relations

## Achievements, Challenges and External Influences

*Vasiliki Papatheologo*

Interregionalism is a pragmatic strategy for action by the EU, and a tool to extend norms and European values to the developing world while promoting global governance. To this end, the EU has developed several interregional and trans-regional frameworks around in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Focusing specifically on interregionalism as an EU tool to promote regional governance in the East Asia region, this study examines relations between the EU and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as a practical instance of pure interregionalism. This investigation negotiates the internal functions of interregionalism in EU-ASEAN bilateral relations along with its achievements and the challenges of bilateral interregional relationships. The work also deals with some external influences on EU-ASEAN interregionalism and highlights the great and regional powers (specifically the US and China) and their attitudes to the interregionalism being promoted by the EU to ASEAN and more generally in the East Asia region.

*Keywords* Interregionalism, European Union, ASEAN, China, US, European Values



### Introduction

Historically, interregionalism was an innovation of the EU's external relations framework as well as a product of the EU's status as the

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pre-eminent actor of its type. Since interregionalism's initial unfolding – as an external relations framework – it has developed into a distinct layer of the architecture of global governance and part of the international system.<sup>1</sup> Indeed, as a new wave of regionalism emerged over the last two decades, regional organisations have made efforts to establish themselves as real and significant international actors. In this context, interregional relations between regional entities have intensified, transforming the landscape of interregionalism from an EU-centred policy into one in which multiple actors play a part.

Nevertheless, the EU's version of interregionalism continues to be characterised by intense institutionalisation and the EU's own extensive integration. Specifically, the EU's international relations exist, to a large extent, in the interregionalism framework, reflecting a consistent search for structures within which to couch the EU's relationships with its external partners. Indeed, the importance of group-to-group relations is recognised in the Commission's claims that regional integration provides a chance to rationalise external relations and international cooperation.

Internationally, the EU becomes a normative power by exporting norms and values around the globe via interregionalism, which is the main tool of EU foreign policy. The interregionalism concept plays three key functions in EU external relations: first it aims to manage global interdependence; the primary axis of EU foreign policy. Second, it is a tool for achieving further regional governance since it facilitates the regionalisation process and establishes the "actorness" of regional entities. Finally, it attempts to manage political and economic dialogue with other partners and regional actors. In this sense, interregionalism is both a practical EU strategy and an alternative world order for managing global interdependence.

As an EU external policy tool, interregionalism enables the EU to expand its role in the East Asia region. It is true that the EU lacks an active role in East Asia and its main motives are economic at both multilateral and bilateral levels based on the upping of its economic and normative power. Interregionalism may, however, also provide a chance to the EU to actively participate in East Asia and so become a mediator of the balance of power there.

Admittedly, the EU's approach to East Asia remains fragmented when compared to its relations with other regions such as Africa and

Latin America. This is largely attributed to the culturally heterogeneity and diversity of the region and the geographic distant it is from Europe. From a geopolitical point of view, the EU's role as a global power in Asia remains limited, and in this context, Asians see the EU more as a normative civilian power and example of regional integration potentially applicable to Asia than as a great power.

In focusing on the EU's position on Asia and exploring the place of interregionalism in its Asia policies, it is important to note that the EU's strategy in Asia is broad and divided into four main approaches. The first of these is bilateral and includes the EU's relations with its main Asian partners such as China, Korea and Japan. The EU's bilateral relations with these Asian countries mainly involve trade and investments. The second approach is multilateral and concerns the EU's participation in multilateral forums in the East Asia region such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) where the EU acts more as a normative power than a strategic one. In a multilateral forum such as the ARF, the EU's role remains limited since the US and China are the major actors in the East Asia region. Nevertheless, the EU's participation in ARF is a sign that the promotion of multilateralism is one of the main axes of the EU's external policies in East Asia. The EU's third way to East Asia relates to transregionalism within the framework of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). The EU has a coherent role in the ASEM as a norm-making power. As an example of transregionalism or complex interregionalism however, ASEM has limited utility given the low level of actorness of its Asian partners, particularly since, in the ASEM context, East Asia is not represented as a united region but rather through separate, disparate Asian member states. The fourth EU approach deals with pure interregionalism, focusing on the EU-ASEAN relationship, which is a practical instance of this strategy. Through the EU-ASEAN region-to-region interaction, the EU is able to construct an external identity and present itself as an ideal type of regional institution and a normative power in external affairs.

The main goal of this study is to demonstrate how interregionalism works in the EU-ASEAN relationship and, in particular, to explore interregionalism's theoretical functions in this context. The influence of external factors is assumed here by reference to the role of great powers such as the US and China in the regionalisation process in East Asia as well as their place in EU-ASEAN interregionalism. A review of



the existing literature provides the theoretical background for interregionalism along with the reasons for its existence from a global governance standpoint. This existing literature, however, approaches the EU-ASEAN relationship in terms of bilateralism and does not engage with its interregional dimensions or the role of interregionalism as a theoretical framework. Against this backdrop, this work considers internal factors in EU-ASEAN interregionalism which can be traced to International Relations theories and to the bilateral features of the EU-ASEAN relationship.

### Functions of Interregionalism in EU-ASEAN Relations based on International Relations Theories

The answer to this study's inquiry into how interregionalism works in the EU-ASEAN bilateral relationship can be found in International Relations approaches and interregionalism's theoretical framework. In particular, while ASEAN and EU models of regionalism may seem similar, this resemblance is only superficial; they are very different and contradictory formulations. In the EU's case, integration was a legally established, deep-seated process based on a strong institutional strategy involving the sharing of sovereignty and its common exercise. In contrast, ASEAN integration has been of a regional process that makes space for the consolidating of national sovereignty and for nation and state-building. Its goal is consolidation and not the sharing of sovereignty.

In order to unpack the EU-ASEAN relationship as a case of 21<sup>st</sup>-century interregionalism, it is important to consider a theoretical framework for interregionalism. This can also help in understanding how the diversity and complexities of these two regions have been handled both within the EU and in the context of their interregional relationship. Distinguishing materialist, ideological and institutional theories is useful in order to grasp the ways that the three become entangled in this relationship in practice. The theoretical framework must also show how diverse EU-ASEAN relations coexist and interact in the multi-level character of EU-ASEAN relations.

The EU and ASEAN share a commitment to regional integration as a means of fostering regional stability, building prosperity and addressing global challenges. In addition, the EU fully supports the renewed efforts of the ASEAN to build closer relationships among its members.

The first function of interregionalism relates to *identity building*. The concept of collective identity formation stems from constructivist notions of actor identity. This is based on the argument that the fundamental structures of international relations are social in nature and that these structures, rather than simply facilitating and constraining action, help to sculpt actor interests and identities.<sup>2</sup> As an increasingly institutionalised structure of region-to-region relations, interregionalism offers a platform for contact between regional actors as well as a venue for socialisation and, thus, a framing context for the construction of collective regional identities and awareness. In other words, interregionalism is an example of the claim that as the “dynamic density” of interactions increases, so too will the potential for endogenous transformations of identity.<sup>3</sup> Where no firm identity has previously been established, a collective identity is more likely to be formed through interaction with an external “Other” if the external dialogue partner is a significant, more coherent entity. When it comes to identity building in the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship the EU, as a normative power, promotes interregionalism in order to spread norms and values which facilitate regional integration and actorness.

The second function of interregionalism in the EU-ASEAN relationship is *institution building*. Recognition of the importance of institution-building within interregionalism comes from the liberal institutionalist emphasis on the role of institutions in mitigating against potential causes of conflict; institutions instead generate cooperative outcomes and have a legalising effect on international relations. This stems from the view that institutions matter in world politics. Interregionalism involves the creation of a cooperative dialogue structure, moving into a formal arrangement. The process of interregional institution-building therefore helps strengthen the institutionalisation of international politics.<sup>4</sup> Another institutionalism-based interpretation holds that EU-ASEAN interregionalism is a way of institutionalising dialogues between the two entities. On a broader view, this is part of the globalisation of world politics at a multilateral level.

Interregionalism’s third and final function is *providing balance*. More specifically, the notion that interregionalism performs a balancing role in international relations comes from realist conceptions of actor competition. From this view, anarchy and a self-help approach to security lead to the accumulation of power individually or as part of a temporary coalition. The result is the emergence of a relatively stable

balance of power. While on the traditional realist approach, such power is defined in terms of territory, population, resources and military capacity, in the globalised world of the new interregionalism, power is increasingly seen to be founded on economic strength. Interregional balancing therefore constitutes a system of checks and balances developed through the diversification of political and economic relations and designed to avoid marginalisation and consolidate a multilateral system of shared principles, rules and norms. When potential courses of action are limited through a multilateral framework and the threat of economic and political marginalisation, the ability of any pole to act unilaterally is constrained. Through the structure of interregionalism, regional actors have sought to limit their dependence on others, remedy structural and relational imbalances of power and guarantee the preservation or promotion of their political and economic interests.

The EU-ASEAN relationship includes all three described functions of interregionalism. Yet, while identity building and institutionalisation are based on internal factors and the motivations of the main participants in interregionalism, i.e. the EU as the exporter and the ASEAN as the recipient, the third function of balancing power includes both internal and external factors and motivations. As such, it gives a more rounded and realistic explanation of the function of interregionalism.

So, when it comes to the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship, the reasons why regional entities and external actors (global powers) each participate in and support interregionalism are largely ideological and based on the globalisation of world politics. At the same time, however, the realist explanation can provide an answer about how interregionalism actually works since when practising interregionalism, the main motivation is balancing power within institutional-interregional frameworks.

### Opportunities and Challenges in EU-ASEAN Bilateral Interregionalism

The EU-ASEAN bilateral interregional dialogue is largely defined by what is achievable when qualitatively different regional actors meet. It is clear that the EU's aspirations for dialogue draw from ideas of capacity building and globally active varieties of interregionalism. Even so, the ability to deliver on these goals has been determined largely by the

asymmetry between the EU and the ASEAN as actors. Of note here is the failure of interregionalism to rekindle the EU's hopes regarding its role in the broader architecture of global governance. The strategy has not delivered the cooperative multilateral partnership so often highlighted as central to the EU concept of interregionalism. This is despite that investments in the post-bipolar world have been crucial to the interregional relationship.

Three features of EU-ASEAN interregionalism may therefore be highlighted. The first concerns the place of economic balancing as an effective basis for cooperation. It is in the economic sphere that the EU's actorness is primarily to be felt, and there are unsurprisingly concerns over market access, trade and ASEAN relations. The performance of bilateral interregionalism at global level has failed to meet these expectations. The main problem has been the limited actorness of both the EU and the ASEAN. Second is its continuing emphasis on the functions of a globally active interregional relationship. With the rise of global governance institutions in the post-bipolar era, these functions have increasingly been seen as the measure of success of the EU-ASEAN Charter integration project. This may change, however.

A third and final feature stems from the asymmetrical actorness of the EU and the ASEAN. The interregional relationship has been characterised by the performance of actions linked to capacity building for interregionalism. Alongside the non-purposive construction and reinforcement of ASEAN collective identity, one consequence of engaging with a more coherent regional "Other," is an increasingly strategic process of region building. Both the EU and the ASEAN have used EU-ASEAN interregionalism as a mechanism for fostering Southeast Asian regionalism. Within the architecture of interregionalism, a range of programmes have been set up with the aim of increasing the capacity of ASEAN Secretariat as an interlocutor in the integration process. Further, ASEAN has elaborated clear goals for its own integration; this capacity-building process has become strategic.<sup>5</sup>

In this context, subsequent bilateral interregional agreements have formally recognised the EU-ASEAN relationship. In the era of the 1983 Cooperation Agreement with the European Commission, the Cartagena Agreement recognised the establishment of sub-committees, while the 1989 EC-Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Cooperation Agreement formally acknowledged engagements at ministerial level. Three core

elements make up the backbone of the EU's bilateral interregionalism with ASEAN. The first is the ministerial level meeting, which takes decisions in pursuit of interregional goals. The ASEAN EU Ministerial Meeting (AEMM), for example, is convened every 18 months with representatives of both the EU and the ASEAN. The second, the Joint Cooperation Committee (JCC), assists the institution at ministerial level; it comprises officials from each region and is called at least once a year. The third consists of the subcommittees and working groups established by either the ministerial level or the JCC. These subcommittees are issue-based and include a trade group along with others bearing on specific issues in EU-ASEAN relations.<sup>6</sup>

As a mechanism of interregionalism, the AEMM enhances the political dialogue. Human rights promotion is another feature of the EU's advancement of interregionalism to the ASEAN. More specifically, the EU supports the work of the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission for Human Rights (AICHR), the overarching rights promotion and protection body in the ASEAN. This support exists through regional dialogues, seminars and technical cooperation programmes. EU-ASEAN cooperation takes place in regional and international forums including the UN and the ASEM, where it is seen as a way of strengthening the multilateral system. In contrast, the EU's own motives for promoting regional cooperation are to maintain peace, activity and stability and continue bolstering ASEAN's central place in the evolving regional architecture. Furthermore, the EU is involved in the areas of maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, peacekeeping operations, military medicine and counter-terrorism. In parallel, it adds weight to the role of the ARF where the ASEAN is the primary force promoting peace and stability as well as dialogue and cooperation in the Asia-Pacific region.

In terms of implementing pure interregionalism, the EU uses the political dialogue arising from its security/political cooperation with ASEAN, to address a number of "non-traditional" security activities. These include, for example, promoting dialogue and cooperation on ways to tackle transnational crime and supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Convention on Counter-Terrorism. Further, the EU and the ASEAN cooperate closely in the areas of conflict prevention, peace-building, crisis management, disarmament and non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction. This joint work happens through workshops, seminars and exchanges of best practices and experiences.<sup>7</sup>

Economic cooperation is another crucial area of EU-ASEAN relations. The EU promotes dialogue and the provision of technical assistance to the ASEAN when it comes to economic and social policy. This is done with a view to contributing to sustainable development. Taken as a whole, the ASEAN is also the EU's third largest trading partner outside Europe (after the US and China).

Alongside trade negotiations with individual ASEAN members, the EU cooperates closely with the whole ASEAN region. This cooperation is maintained through:

1. EU-ASEAN dialogue, which includes discussions on trade and investment issues at ministerial and with senior economic aide levels.
2. Seminars conducted by the EU and the ASEAN Secretariat on topics such as regional economic integration, liberalising services, technical barriers to trade and trade facilitation.<sup>8</sup>

Cooperation concerning energy security is also part of the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship. The focus here is on promoting energy security and efficiency along with conservation measures and technologies. The EU supports the stimulation of regional programmes for ASEAN on developing alternative energy sources as well as nuclear energy and safety.

Socio-cultural cooperation is one of the main tools for promoting EU-ASEAN interregionalism. This entails cooperation on "low" political matters like education and health, and person-to-person contact. In the education sector, for example, the EU encourages the mobility of students and academics between ASEAN and EU higher institutions.

Promoting exchanges among cultural artists and scholars is another way of strengthening EU-ASEAN relations. In the health sector, this cooperation is enhanced by encouraging exchanges of knowledge and experiences among public health and medical experts. Gender equality is a further focus for cooperation through the exchange of experiences and practices. The EU offers programmes and policies on the wellbeing of women, children, the elderly and people with disabilities. Regarding disaster management, the EU has boosted its cooperation with the ASEAN Committee on Disaster Management by sharing experiences and support related to best preventative practices. It also encourages partnerships with relevant stakeholders, including local communities, non-governmental organisations (NGOs), civil society and private enterprises.

In science and technology, the EU promotes cooperation in research and technical innovation under the Seventh Framework Programme and the Horizon 2020 Programme. This includes support for the ASEAN's establishment of a network of science and technology centres of excellence to foster closer cooperation and the sharing of research facilities. Such closer cooperation facilitates exchanges and the greater mobility of scientists and researchers. Concerning global environmental challenges, the EU offers technical support and capacity building to assist with the ASEAN's implementation of implementing Multilateral Environmental Agreements (MEAs) and the ASEAN Climate Change Initiative (ACCI). Moreover, the EU encourages sub-regional cooperation to boost socio-economic development and sustainable water management.

In terms of institutional support for ASEAN, the EU first of all supports measures to build the capacities of the ASEAN Secretariat and other ASEAN institutions. Second, it promotes exchange programmes with the ASEAN and particularly between the EU Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat. Finally, the EU endorses the establishment of institutional links between the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and the Committee of Permanent Representatives in the EU (COREPER). Connections include through exchanges among officials, the sharing of best practices and visits.<sup>9</sup>

### Key Challenges for EU-ASEAN Interregional Relations

Multiple challenges have been evident in the EU-ASEAN relationship since the signing of the 1980 Cooperation Agreement. The first of these challenges is the absence of a clear cooperation agenda. Economic balancing factors have instead been the primary force behind the EU-ASEAN relationship, and they form the basis for cooperation that is supplemented by political and security-based reactions to external triggers. This default economic setting for EU interregionalism is the product of the EU's role as an economic actor in this context. In the EU-ASEAN relationship especially, economic goals have largely been defined in terms of the self-focused balancing function of interregionalism.

A second challenge lies in the contrast between the fulfilment of the functions of EU interregionalism associated with capacity building on

the one hand, and the failure to meet increasing expectations for dialogue linked to the high-end aspects of a globally active interregionalism on the other. These high-end functions are expressed in the strategy documents of the AEMM and the Commission.<sup>10</sup>

Regarding the challenges of EU-ASEAN bilateral interregionalism, it is also clear that each side has a different top priority in the relationship. For the EU, China is undoubtedly the biggest priority in Asia, and most political energy and economic resources have been concentrated there even in the context of an overall deficit of EU involvement in Asia. For the ASEAN, in contrast, the number-one priority relationship is with the US not only because it is the ASEAN's main trading partner but also since it is the key strategic player in Southeast Asia. The presence of the US provides an important guarantee of regional security, especially as a counterpoint to the growing power and influence of China. To a large extent, the ASEAN has assumed the EU to be a player whose instrumental balancing function in the region lies in moderating American and Chinese influences.

In addition, there is the issue of the EU's dual identity as a strong and coherent actor in matters of "low" politics such as trade and economics where the EU acts with a single voice, and a weak and divided actor in "high" political areas like defence and security where it has multiple and contradictory voices. The fact that the EU has played no role in the regional security framework – a structure traditionally dominated by tough security questions and the risks of conflict between states - has contributed over the years to reducing the EU's relevance in the South-east Asia region. Security awareness in that region is acute.

Moreover, ASEAN enlargement in the second half of the 1990s decreased the level of cohesion inside the ASEAN and created a two-speed process and a more insular orientation that is aggravated by the economic and social crises of the Asian financial meltdown. Significantly, it has also generated the Myanmar problem, which has been a stumbling block in EU-ASEAN relations. The regional process has lost momentum because of a lack of leadership after Indonesia left that role, exhausted by its own domestic turmoil.

Finally, to reiterate, despite their surface similarity, the ASEAN and the EU models of regionalism are different and conflicting. For the EU, integration was a legally established intensive process driven by a strong institutional strategy involving the sharing of sovereignty and



its common exercise. In contrast, the ASEAN clearly sought to create a regional process that allows space for the consolidating of national sovereignty and nation and state-building. Its focus has, thus, been consolidation rather than the sharing of sovereignty. Nevertheless, there is interest in developing para-diplomatic links between EU regions/subnational governments on one side, and subnational governments and regional players in ASEAN countries on the other.

Lacking a holistic direction and still largely dominated by economic factors, EU-ASEAN relations have not just registered a clear decline in recent years with trade and foreign direct investment (FDI) flows dropping and political relations becoming hostage to the Myanmar problem: the relationship now runs the risk of turning into a secondary one. Changes in Southeast Asia, and especially the progress in democratisation and human rights standards which brought the ASEAN closer to the EU, have so far had no major impact on - or even contributed to - the reinvigoration of the relationship. Excessive governmentalisation, the dual identity of the EU and its ambiguous status as an international player and the divergence between EU and ASEAN models of regional integration, are some of the structural obstacles that account for current difficulties. These challenges have been assumed in the literature and framed against the qualitative difference in the actorness of the two regions when defining the real nature of the EU-ASEAN relationship.

This point about the asymmetrical relations between the EU and the ASEAN leads us to interregionalism's final balancing function, which is itself influenced by external factors. In particular, great global powers such as the US and China have an impact on EU-ASEAN interregionalism, which serves as a tool for balancing power and stability in the East Asia region. In this context, interregionalism expands the EU's role as a mediator in the region. In terms of external factors, the US and China as global powers view this interregionalism positively as an opportunity for regional governance and stability.

### **External Actors in EU-ASEAN Bilateral Interregionalism: The Role of the Great Powers**

Turning to the external influences and, in particular, the role of the great powers in EU-ASEAN interregionalism, the key argument is that

EU-ASEAN interregional relations are in fact influenced by changes in the balance of power in the East Asia region. Even a realist explanation of EU-ASEAN interregionalism should take into account the ideological reasons why states (great powers) participate in and support interregionalism based on institutionalism and multilateralism. More specifically, we can make the case that the key great powers involved in the East Asia region (the US and China) can influence EU-ASEAN interregional relations and they are actually positive about interregionalism. This is because interregionalism is, on the one hand, an institutional tool which can provide a platform for multilateral cooperation and regional governance, and on the other, a way of ensuring the balance of power and stability in the East Asia region.

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As may be guessed from the range of areas of cooperation among the EU, the US and the ASEAN, the US approves of EU-ASEAN interregionalism. This is for a number of key reasons. First, the EU and the US remain allied and share many of the same fundamental governing and social values and aims in East Asia. Second, interregionalism is a tool for promoting multilateralism in the region, and third, in the face of regionalisation, interregionalism can be a tool for balancing power in the East Asia region. Through interregionalism, East Asia has the potential to be a region where more than one or two superpowers (the US, China, India, Russia, etc.) and regional entities (ASEAN, ASEAN+3, the EU etc.) are active. In sum, the US takes an affirmative view of the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship because the EU, its ally, shares its foreign policy values, and at the same time, the interregionalism concept can facilitate multilateralism and promote a power balance in the East Asia region, which is the main concern of US policy on East Asia.

To give a full picture of the impact of external factors on interregionalism, it is necessary to explore the role of China as a regional power in East Asia and, by extension, its involvement in and positive take on EU-ASEAN interregionalism. Lastly, we can consider China's overall attitude to the EU's role in East Asia as an exporter of interregionalism.

China takes a favourable view of EU-ASEAN interregionalism because interregionalism is a platform for balancing power in the East Asia region. In addition, through EU-derived interregionalism, China has the chance to learn how to promote regional governance and participate actively in forming a regional identity. By responding positively to interregionalism, China may eventually have the opportunity to

advance its own image as a “responsible power” both regionally and globally. The institutional framework of the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship, thus, has China’s approval since China itself intends to be a responsible power in the Asia-Pacific region by improving the institutional framework there. Turning to the EU-China relationship, China sees the EU as a trading partner as well as a civilian and normative power from which China can learn how to foster regionalism. The EU example can, thus, give lessons to China about how to implement and actively participate in the regionalisation process in East Asia. From a geopolitical point of view, the EU’s geo-strategic role in the East Asia region is limited since the main axis of EU foreign policy is promotion of interregionalism and multilateralism through a systematic institutional framework. The EU has no strategic interest in the region beyond increasing interdependent trade with its Asian partners and the flow of investments. In this context, China looks positively on the EU’s intentions in the region and sees the EU as a partner and not a competitor since China benefits from trade with the EU and, at the same time, the interregionalism which the EU is promoting gives China the chance to learn how to deal with regional organisations in the area.

More generally, external factors in the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship, including the roles of the great powers and the international system influence the functions of interregionalism. The impact of the great powers on EU-ASEAN relations is, however, positive: on the one hand, the US sees EU-ASEAN interregionalism as a chance to balance power in the East; on the other, China approaches EU-ASEAN interregionalism as first an opportunity to interact with regionalism in East Asia and prove itself ready to emerge peacefully as a responsible power and second a chance to learn from the EU example of building up regionalism. Experiences of the EU-ASEAN relationship indicate that the reasons why states participate and interact with interregionalism relate mainly to the functions of identity building and institutionalising international relations. Still, states which participate and interact with interregionalism do so with the motive of achieving balance in an interregional framework. This is the function that interregionalism serves in the international system and especially in EU-ASEAN relations given the fact that the East Asia region contains actors with a diversity of intentions when it comes to the balance of power and given the potential for China’s leadership. The latter is a factor which motivates both the US as a great power and other regional powers to look for

ways to achieve balance within multilateral, regional, transregional and interregional forums.

## Conclusion

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Having analysed the EU-ASEAN relationship as an example of pure interregionalism, we may infer that interregionalism can work successfully in a context of regional actors. The EU-ASEAN relationship interregionalism is, thus, effective as a result of the high level of regional actorness of the two parties. To this end, the EU promotes interregionalism to the ASEAN as an existing regional entity in East Asia. In its multilateral approach to Asia, the EU's role remains limited within an economic and political framework since the great powers such as the US and China enjoy more influential positions. Within the ASEM structure, the East Asia region lacks real actorness and thus, the results of interregionalism are not so effective. In the EU-ASEAN relationship, however, the EU takes an active role by promoting interregionalism as a "stabilising instrument" for the East Asia region and promoting regional actorness and governance. It is assumed that the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship is influenced by internal and external factors. The internal factors consist of the political, economic, social and interregional characteristics of the bilateral relationship, the functions of interregionalism based on International Relations theories and the EU's own motives in promoting regional actorness and governance using interregionalism as a tool in its external policies involving the ASEAN. The external factors which influence the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship are defined by the role of key great powers, which act in East Asia with a view to the balance of power and stability in the region. In particular, the great powers (specifically the US and China) are positive about the EU-ASEAN interregional relationship, which is mainly driven by ideological and institutional factors but whose results address stability, regional identity creation and governance in the East Asia region. By supporting interregionalism, the US strengthens its role in the region and preserves its allies. China, on the other hand, has the chance to promote itself as a responsible power in the region by participating in the creation of regional governance. This is a practical way in which it can increase its role in the region via multilateral and interregional methods.<sup>11</sup>

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## Notes

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- 9 Ibid.
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