

STRENGTHENING EAST ASIA'S REGIONAL AND EXTRA-REGIONAL RELATIONS: A PRESENTATION OUTLINE¹

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Main Definitional and Other Issues

- What is the region referred to as “East Asia”? Is it East Asia of the ASEAN+3 as defined by the East Asia Vision Group (EAVG) and the East Asia Study Group (EASG), or is it the East Asia of the East Asia Summit (EAS) launched in Kuala Lumpur in December 2005, otherwise known as ASEAN+3+3 or ASEAN+6? If it is the East Asia of the ASEAN+3, then regional relations would apply to the relations between and among the ASEAN 10 plus China, Japan, and South Korea, and extra-regional relations would embrace all partners and relevant actors outside of these 13 countries. If East Asia is however the region of the EAS, then regional relations would cover those between and among the ASEAN 10 plus China, Japan, and South Korea plus Australia, India, and New Zealand, while extra-regional relations would apply to partners and relevant actors beyond these 16 countries.
- It is not so easy to resolve this main definitional issue because a consensus on the main purposes of ASEAN+3 and the EAS has not yet been reached. This is an issue that is very much part of the question regarding a regional security architecture for “East Asia”. While there has been a proliferation of mechanisms, bodies, dialogue processes, and institutions that deal with or touch on security broadly defined, a consensus on a regional security architecture which defines the functional boundaries of these mechanisms, bodies, dialogue processes, and institutions as well as how they relate to one another has yet to be forged.
- In order to discuss the theme of this session, this presentation will refer to the region embraced by the EAS as “East Asia” consisting of the 16 countries

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currently participating in this mechanism, and extra-regional to refer to the United States (US), Russia, and the European Union (EU), among other partners or relevant actors.

- Another important issue is the wide diversity of East Asia's historical, geographic, political, diplomatic, security, economic, etc. backgrounds, experiences, ties, and realities. Strengthening regional and extra-regional relations would be challenged by these many gaps and divides between and among them.

Strengthening East Asia's Regional Relations

- In the Southeast Asian sub-region, there is a need to strengthen the relations among the ASEAN 10 through the realization of the ASEAN Community of three pillars (economic, political security, and socio-cultural pillars) at the earliest possible time, although currently it is set at 2015, moved earlier from the original 2020 deadline at a time of ASEAN's recovery of its self-confidence temporarily lost during the Asian financial crisis of 1997-1998.
- Unfortunately, the ASEAN Charter which was widely seen as a tool to empower ASEAN to realize this community has not delivered on expectations, raised by ASEAN leaders themselves. Instead, it is a document that beyond the aspirational goals and principles found in its preamble and elsewhere in the Charter has institutionalized its member states' determination to conduct business as usual at a time when this is no longer useful or effective "amidst rising risks". In brief, the "ASEAN way" of conducting business based on Westphalian norms will continue to define interstate behavior among them. While there are institutional innovations such as two additional deputies to the Secretary General and an enabling provision for the establishment of a human rights body, there is no budgetary provision for them, among many other deficiencies. Consensus decision making remains the principal method for making decisions; compliance remains voluntary without penalties for non-compliance, and while the Leaders Summit can make decisions other than consensus, it is unimaginable whether there might be six countries in the ASEAN 10 that would be able to forge an

agreement to pool sovereignty to become more effective in these challenging times.

- Northeast Asia's plus 3 countries need to effect regional reconciliation of the kind that enabled Southeast Asia through ASEAN to achieve regional reconciliation earlier on. While the plus 3 countries have held direct bilateral dialogues, outside the ASEAN processes, and were almost about to hold their first summit outside of ASEAN's Related Summits in September 2008, this did not materialize due to Japan's change in government, genuine reconciliation is yet to be reached, requiring in the meantime the "mediation" or interlocution by ASEAN. No doubt, Northeast Asian reconciliation can facilitate and contribute immensely to the improvement and strengthening of East Asia's relations as evidenced by the relative success of the 6 party talks process in addressing the North Korean nuclear weapons program. But while relations among the three countries have vastly improved, domestic political considerations often reinforce the structural roots of competition thereby limiting the drivers of cooperative behavior. A subtext of Northeast Asian reconciliation other than the normalization of North-South Korean relations and the denuclearization of North Korea sought by the 6 party talks is cross-strait relations which appear to be on the mend with the election of Ma Ying-jeou in Chinese Taipei. Should these two issues, both legacies of the Cold War be successfully managed if not fully resolved, East Asia's regional relations could be vastly strengthened.
- Finally, a clear functional focus for the EAS can strengthen East Asia's regional relations that would help rationalize the participation of Australia, India, and New Zealand in this mechanism. One way is to use the ASEAN+3 as the basis for functional cooperation in East Asia, and using the EAS as a strategic dialogue mechanism that could embrace other strategic actors which fulfill the three ASEAN-generated criteria for EAS participation. Surely, the strategic importance of Australia (with New Zealand) and India to regionalism in this part of the world is widely recognized. This way, the perception or suspicion that the EAS represents a "hedging" strategy by some countries in the region vis-à-vis the uncertainties of a risen China could be mitigated.

Strengthening East Asia's Extra-Regional Relations

- The key partners in extra-regional relations could include the US, Russia, and the EU. The US is the ever-present “ghost” in East Asia community building efforts, whether in the ASEAN+3 context or the EAS. Its deep and long economic, military, political, and diplomatic ties with key East Asian countries and with the broader Pacific Asian region would make it almost impossible to imagine US disengagement from this region. We can speculate and debate on whether and how the US might be engaged under an Obama Administration to strengthen East Asia's relations with it. His foreign policy statements declaring a thrust to use all instruments of power and influence to include diplomatic, economic, political, and military in order to regain the US position in the world, including in East Asia – that was so seriously undermined especially during the George W. Bush Administration - could be an opening for crafting measures to strengthen ties with the US both at the regional and bilateral levels. Among the possibilities of enhanced relations with the US is Washington's accession to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) which should qualify it to join the EAS. The Obama Administration could continue to pursue productive measures taken by its predecessor such as the 6 party talks process on the Korean Peninsula, constructive engagement with China, etc. While President-elect Obama is certain to be preoccupied with domestic issues, external relations would be presided over by Hillary Clinton as already discussed in the first session yesterday.
- In bilateral relations there are spaces appropriate to each East Asian country's preferences where ties with the US can be enhanced. The region's diversity could prevent a coherent regional set of measures, yet enable the adoption of a wide range of new forms of cooperation between individual East Asian states and the US. New leadership provides spaces for constructive engagement and cooperation because personalities do matter. East Asia should be able to explore and exploit these spaces with a new administration in Washington.
- Relations with Russia should be strengthened as well. This could help moderate Russia's perception of being targeted by US and NATO policies and alleviate its

sense of isolation in the European context, with or without basis. Moscow's engagement through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and being a full dialogue partner of ASEAN should facilitate this process.

- And the enhancement of relations with the EU can be done through the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), although not all of the 16 EAS countries are involved in ASEM. Although Europe's interest in East Asia has been mainly economic, ASEM 's three pillars go beyond this and extend as far as people-to-people contacts through the Asia-Europe Foundation's (ASEF) intellectual and educational hub programs and civil society activities. As Ambassador Wiryono is a member of ASEF's Board of Governors, he is certain to provide a better perspective on EU-East Asia relations.

Concluding Remarks

East Asia's first priority should be strengthening its regional relations by redressing the drivers of competition and increasing cooperation as well as forging as many areas of consensus on how to engage the outside world. Its diversity in historical, geographical, political, diplomatic, economic, and security backgrounds, perspectives, and realities are major obstacles towards forging this consensus. With such consensus, however, it would be far easier to strengthen regional and extra-regional relations and thus prosper regionalism within East Asia as well as contribute to enhanced extra-regional relations.

