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## EUROPE AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: CORPORATE AND SOCIAL IDENTITIES. PROSPECTS FOR THE NORMS DIFFUSION

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**Abstract:** Different international relations theories explain the role of the EU and ASEAN in different ways. As they focus on the specific explanation, using their own methodology, and starting points, they differ in the assumptions and explanations. Among others, social constructivism tries to deal with the problem from its specific perspective, focusing on the idea of corporate and social identities. Those identities lead actors to define their interests in certain ways and display particular types of behaviour. Hence, the EU's and ASEAN's identities influence their interactions, and help to support/negate acceptance of different types of norms.

**Key words:** corporate and social identities, norms localization, ASEAN, European Union.

### 1. Introduction

Europe occupies a special position in the theory of regional integration. The first theoretical explanations of regionalism were based on the European experience. Europe became first and foremost an object of analysis and scientific enquiry, and a cornerstone of investigations under the “old regionalism” theoretical framework. But the current wave of regionalism (“new regionalism”) emphasizes that Europe is no longer a main model, but one of the empirical examples of regional cooperation. In a former approach, other regions were expected to emulate or introduce the European model. Hence, the oft-repeated characterization of Asian regionalism as “loose” or “informal” reflects, as Richard Higgott pointed out, a teleological prejudice informed by the assumption that “progress” in regional organization is defined in terms of the EU-style institutionalization. In that school of thinking the EU is the paradigmatic case of regionalism against which all other regional projects are judged.<sup>1</sup> This kind of logic is supporting, as Amitav Acharya argues, a tendency to draw stark and final contrast between regionalism in Asia and Europe. But despite the acceptance of the fact that there are fundamental differences between the political and security conditions

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<sup>1</sup> R. Higgott, *Alternative models of regional cooperation? The limits of regional institutionalization in East Asia*, [in:] M. Telò (ed.), *European Union and New Regionalism. Regional Actors and Global Governance in a Post-Hegemonic Era*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2007, p. 77.

in Europe and Asia, he suggests that the differences in opinion regarding the future (optimism vs. pessimism) of regionalism in East Asia may be exaggerated.<sup>2</sup> In the various regional discourses taking place in the Asia-Pacific region, and East Asia in particular, the very idea of using as a basis for the dialogue on Asian regionalism European model was largely unthinkable. The perception of the European legal formalism and the prospect of a “Brussels in Asia” were particularly unpopular. However, since the turn of the century there has been a change of feelings in East Asia. In the wake of the financial crisis observers have focused, among others, on the enhanced dialogue on regional monetary cooperation (Chiang Mai agreement), the development of APT,<sup>3</sup> regulatory and participatory regionalism.<sup>4</sup> But still the direct emulation of European experience is implausible. Even if self-confidence over the effectiveness of the Asian model of economic performance and regional cooperation in many Asian states is lesser now than a decade earlier, still exist other factors making the assumption on “Europe past, Asia’s Future” largely misleading.

Douglas Webber grouped together existing regional integration theories in two basic schools. The first “school” views regional political integration as a fundamentally market-driven process. Meanwhile, the second “school” treats integration as a politically driven process. In that case inter-governmentalism has its roots in realist and neo-realist traditions of international relations theory.<sup>5</sup> But both “schools” largely underestimated the role of cultural/identity factors. That is why the constructivist approach to international relations offers interesting explanations of regional integration, focusing mostly on issues missing in other theoretical frameworks. It also offers another way of thinking about the possible role of the UE in Asia, together with the promotion of the European approach to regional governance, and the absorption of that model in Asia.

It is important to remember that the intra-Asian differences make it more difficult to speak of a single “Asian” attitude toward international relations. There is no single Asian approach to cooperation, there can also be no single Asian condition of anarchy or disorder. While Europe’s commitment to multilateralism and the rule of law in international affairs is rooted in a determination to transcend the sovereignty-bound nation-state system, Asia’s interest in multilateralism is based primarily on a desire to preserve the existing rules of international relations, especially those

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<sup>2</sup> A. Acharya, Europe and Asia. Reflections on a tale of two regionalisms, [in:] B. Fort, D. Webber (eds.), *Regional Integration in East Asia and Europe. Convergence or divergence?*, Routledge, London and New York 2006, pp. 312-321.

<sup>3</sup> R. Higgott, *op. cit.*, pp. 75-76.

<sup>4</sup> Ł. Fijałkowski, What kind of regionalism? The ideas of regional co-operation in Southeast Asia, [in:] Z. Šabič, Ł. Fijałkowski, A. Bojinović Fenko (eds.), *Global Impact of Regional International Organizations. Issues of Regionalism and Regional Integration*, Wydawnictwo Adam Marszałek, Toruń 2009, pp. 167-189.

<sup>5</sup> D. Webber, Regional integration in Europe and Asia. A historical perspective, [in:] B. Fort, D. Webber (eds.), *op. cit.*, pp. 291-396.

related to sovereignty. While Europe pursues a principled multilateralism, Asian multilateralism is conditioned by fundamentally pragmatic concerns about state and regime security.<sup>6</sup> In my paper, I will concentrate on the specific example of the interactions between EU and Southeast Asia, in the form of ASEAN, using the constructivist concept of corporate and social identity. The paper is structured in the following way: section 2 contains a brief description of the Alexander Wendt's concept of identity; the following sections present the corporate and social identities of the EU and ASEAN. The final part of the paper focuses on the idea of norm localization, and ends with conclusions.

## 2. Corporate and social identity: A Wendtian perspective

Different international relations theories explain the role of the EU and ASEAN in different ways. As they focus on the specific explanation, using their own methodology, and starting points, they differ in the assumptions and explanations. Among others, social constructivism tries to deal with the problem from its specific perspective. Constructivism itself is not a coherent theory, and it is possible to find at least several approaches. My understanding of constructivism is based on the Alexander Wendt's approach and the identity-based explanations of state behaviour and inter-state relations. According to Wendt, "constructivism is a structural theory of the international system that makes the following core claims: 1. states are the principal units of analysis for international political theory; 2. the key structures in the states system are inter-subjective rather than material, and 3. state identities and interest are in important part constructed by these social structures rather than given exogenously to the system by human nature or domestic politics".<sup>7</sup> Within the state's identity, it is possible to distinguish corporate and social identity. The first one refers to the intrinsic, self-organizing qualities that constitute actor individuality. The corporate interests (physical security, predictable relations with other actors, recognition and development) generated by corporate identity provide motivational energy for engaging in action at all and are previous to interaction. The state satisfies its corporate interests depending on how it defines the self in relation to the other, which is the function of social identities at both domestic and systemic levels of analysis.<sup>8</sup> States normally have multiple social identities (but one corporate) that vary in salience, leading actors to define their interests in certain ways and display particular types of behaviour. This is possible, because social identities are sets of meanings that an actor attributes to itself while taking the perspective of others. Some state identities and interests stem from international social structures exogenous to

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<sup>6</sup> A. Acharya, *Europe and Asia...*, p. 318.

<sup>7</sup> A. Wendt, *Collective identity formation and the international state*, *American Political Science Review* 1994, Vol. 88, No. 2, p. 385.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibidem*.

the actor.<sup>9</sup> Hence, these exogenous structures are important in determining a state definition of “self”.

Constructivism claims that the behaviour displayed by an actor towards another is contingent upon how it constructs its different identities through a definition of “self” and “other”, and the impact of this construction on the actor’s interests and the perception that the “other” has of it. Hence, the identity constructed by an actor interacting with another and the perception of the latter is what ultimately determines the relationship between both.<sup>10</sup> Identities, constructed through mutual “self” and “other” considerations, are two-dimensional. First, there is an identity intrinsic to an actor, which emanates from the domestic environment of an actor. There is a second identity, which exists only within the context of an external social structure in which the actor interacts with other actors.<sup>11</sup> Both identities shape interests, which determine the behaviour of states and the perception of the other states.<sup>12</sup> As a result, inter-state relations are dependent on interactions in which state’s self-identification is meaningless as long as the other state does not share that identification. This means that self-identities and their perceptions by the other(s) are being defined at each stage of the interaction process. But this does not imply that identities and perceptions are constantly changing, since the interaction process can continuously reinforce previous self-identities and perceptions, creating the self-fulfilling prophecy.<sup>13</sup>

### 3. European Union identity: “Civilian power”

European Union rhetoric on the foreign policy and the role of the EU in world affairs is revolving around the idea of ethical norms and to see Europe as the leading “ethical and normative power”. The image of the UE as a “civilian”, “soft”, “ethical” power, together with strong emphasis on the “global responsibilities” is in the core of the Europe’s self-image. However, vagueness of that vision creates the situation, in which the outside views of the EU are not so coherent and widely accepted.<sup>14</sup>

In searching for an answer as to what the EU’s self-image constitutes, the Treaty of Lisbon makes some noteworthy suggestions. The EU establishes “the cultural, religious and humanist inheritance of Europe, from which have developed

<sup>9</sup> *Ibidem*.

<sup>10</sup> R.P. Pardo, The political weakness of the EU in East Asia: A constructivist approach, *Asia Europe Journal* 2009, Vol. 7, p. 268.

<sup>11</sup> R. Jepperson, A. Wendt, P. Katzenstein, Norms, identity and culture in national security, [in:] P. Katzenstein (ed.), *The Culture of National Security: Norms and Identity in World Politics*, Columbia University Press, New York 1996, p. 59.

<sup>12</sup> A. Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1999, p. 233.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibidem*, pp. 331-334.

<sup>14</sup> H. Mayer, Is it still called ‘Chinese Whispers’? The EU’s rhetoric and action as a responsible global institution, *International Affairs* 2008, Vol. 84, No. 1, pp. 61-79.

the universal values of the inviolable and inalienable rights of the human person, freedom, democracy, equality and the rule of law” as its main principles, together with “the values of respect for human dignity, freedom, democracy, equality, the rule of law and respect for human rights, including the rights of persons belonging to minorities”.<sup>15</sup> Corporate identity is first constructed through adherence to individual and political human rights, to democracy, and to the rule of law as an organizational principle for internal affairs. The EU identifies with these principles by considering itself their source and by conferring upon them the attribute of universality. The EU prioritizes the protection and promotion of principles of which it considers itself the source and which it considers universal. Moreover, the EU describes itself as an actor with “substantial” international standing, expected to “assume its global responsibilities”. The EU’s corporate identity is built upon two concepts. The first one is soft power and its focus on attraction rather than coercion and the use of force. The second concept is multilateralism and the resort to international institutions and norms to advance global causes.<sup>16</sup> Identification with these principles and their proactive peaceful extension in other parts of the world mean that the EU has constructed a self-image of the “ethical power Europe”. In that sense, the EU acts actively, not only representing normative power by diffusion. So, as Jan Zielonka argues, the EU efforts to extend its norms and power as a global level is akin to the creation of an empire, but in the sense that the EU tries to impress alien political and economic concepts on others.<sup>17</sup> Key elements of the development of the EU that makes it different from other systems can be outlined:

1. Europe has a substantial focus on integrated governance systems, linking institutional structures, policies, and legal instruments.
2. In individual policy areas (trade and competition policy) Europe has a sophisticated regulatory framework unequalled at the global level.
3. The EU governance model relies heavily on the rule of law.
4. Access to the European Court of Justice for private individuals as well as member states and supranational institutions makes it distinctive from other international governance models.
5. The EU has introduced a spirit of cooperation amongst diverse groups of member states.
6. The EU has evolved towards a model of governance with a degree of democratic legitimacy.
7. While the EU has emerged as a major actor in the world economy, it is not as successful as a global political actor.<sup>18</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> Treaty of Lisbon, *Official Journal of the European Union*, European Council, Brussels 2007.

<sup>16</sup> P.R. Pardo, *op. cit.*, p. 270.

<sup>17</sup> J. Zielonka, Europe as a global actor: Empire by example?, *International Affairs* 2008, Vol. 84, No. 3, pp. 471-484.

<sup>18</sup> R. Higgott, *op. cit.*, pp. 83-85.

In the case of Asia, the EU has established a social identity, representing itself as a key “partner” of Asian countries, as a supporter of regional cooperation among them and as cooperative partner in soft issues such as climate change, human rights and cooperation. ASEM serves to reinforce the EU’s social identity in Asia through a focus on dialogue, multilateralism, development and an emphasis on soft political issues, as well as economic and cultural matters. The EU’s image projected in Asia is similar to its corporate identity: an attractive benign power who seeks the defence and expansion of the non-negotiable principles of human rights, democracy and the rule of law. The EU recognizes that Asia is a vast continent with differentiated regions, so besides general principles and an ASEM process, the EU self-identifies in Southeast Asia through the dialogue with ASEAN. The ASEAN-EU dialogue relations were formalised in 1977, and institutionalised with the signing of the ASEAN-European Economic Community Cooperation Agreement on March 7, 1980, and EU has since become an ASEAN Dialogue Partner. The ASEAN-EU dialogue relations were strengthened by the adoption of the Nuremberg Declaration on an EU-ASEAN Enhanced Partnership in 2007. The relations concentrate on the inter-related challenges of climate change, energy security, environmental issues and other matters. But the relationships are seriously affected by the violations of the core European principles by some of the ASEAN member states, and the adhesion of Myanmar to ASEAN.

#### **4. ASEAN identity: “ASEAN way”**

In Southeast Asia, ASEAN has become a salient element of the regional identity. But in contrast to Europe, cooperation on regional level has served as an instrument to strengthen the principle of sovereignty, hence the creation of a supranational institution was unthinkable. In regional vocabulary, the national resilience should be a source of regional resilience, in other words, regional order stems from both strong and stable states. This is an important feature of the Southeast Asian approach to regionalism. The task of regionalization was connected with discovering political and economic similarities between a group of quite diverse countries and gathered them within a geographical boundary. The creation of the sense of regional identity was crucial in that process, underlining the idea a region was largely self-constructed and self-promoted. In the centre of that process was the establishment of ASEAN in 1967.

The Southeast Asian self-image concentrate on values and norms expressed in the founding documents constituting “ASEAN diplomatic and security culture”:<sup>19</sup> Bangkok Declaration (1967), Kuala Lumpur Declaration (1971), ASEAN Concord I (1976), and Treaty of Amity and Cooperation, TAC (1976). These documents,

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<sup>19</sup> J. Haacke, *ASEAN’s Diplomatic and Security Culture. Origins, Development and Prospects*, Routledge, London and New York 2005.

together with the practice of inter-state relations, are helpful in identifying the ASEAN corporate identity, often known as an “ASEAN Way”. In this particular instance, corporate identity is constructed by adherence to a group of behavioural and procedural norms, originated from universal international legal norms, and more specific regional cultural norms. The “ASEAN Way” refers to behavioural norms connected with a set of procedural norms and a code of conduct in relations among the states such as respect for sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, peaceful resolution of conflicts, and non-use of force. More unique to ASEAN are norms that order decision-making procedures that ASEAN leaders are expected to follow. According to those prescriptions, ASEAN’s decision-making process should observe the principles of consultation and consensus. Together with a tendency for informality, private talks, a sense of community spirit and non-confrontational behaviour, they constitute the core features of the “ASEAN Way”.<sup>20</sup>

ASEAN social identities in the relations with other actors are built on at least two concepts. Firstly, ASEAN is treated as a “central driver”, “the main force” of regional cooperation, and this centrality should be ensured in the relations with the “others”. Secondly, TAC should become a common basis of any kind of regional interactions, internal as well as external. All ASEAN dialogue partners are invited to accept the Treaty as a regional code of conduct. This distinctive approach to regional cooperation is also transferred to multilateral institutions in the Asia-Pacific region (ARF), or interregional bodies, like ASEM.

Despite the institutional crisis of ASEAN in the wake of the financial crisis and the final stages of the process of enlargement, the corporate identity has not changed much. The first attempts, like the propositions of constructive intervention or flexible engagement in the late 1990s, were criticized and rejected. Instead, the concept of enhanced interaction was adopted, not very dissimilar to the old ideas of cooperation. But the need to address the new challenges was seen, and the ASEAN Community project was launched in 2003. The source of the project was not only the recognition that the norms in the centre of ASEAN’s corporate identity are at stake, but also ASEAN leaders have realized that international position of the grouping is fading, so also the social identity was in danger. The ASEAN Charter, signed in 2007, gives the information in which direction ASEAN is heading. First, ASEAN Charter reaffirms the basic principles of inter-state relations. Second, additional elements are included into the regional code of conduct, referring to “the rule of law, good governance, the principles of democracy and constitutional government” and “respect for fundamental freedoms, the promotion and protection of human rights, and the promotion of social justice”. However, “with due regard to the rights and responsibilities of the Member States of ASEAN”.<sup>21</sup> The critics pointed out that ASEAN Charter did not do as much as it had promised at the start. In this situation, is it possible that the EU social identity

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<sup>20</sup> Ł. Fijałkowski, *op. cit.*

<sup>21</sup> *ASEAN Charter*, ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta 2008.

will influence the ASEAN corporate identity? The extension of the EU principles in Southeast Asia can take three forms: the adoption of the universal international norms originated in the EU, norm diffusion through the multilateral platforms (like ASEM or dialogue with ASEAN), and bilateral contacts with Southeast Asian states. There is no simple answer, but the next section gives some clues about the eventual scenario.

### 5. Social learning and norms localization

The problems that undermine the corporate identity of ASEAN create a new situation, where member states have started the process of changes and institutional adjustments. For the first time in official documents there is adherence to democratic values and rule of law. Finally, in 2007 member states agreed on the ASEAN Charter, as a major step toward an ASEAN Community. From this perspective, it is possible to expect a special role for the EU, not as a model, but as an example (with *tout proportion gardé*). But as it is clear after the earlier paragraphs, the eventual direct absorption of the “new” norms and values by ASEAN is not likely to happen. It is rather impossible that ASEAN countries will dramatically change their collective identity and rebuild it along the European model. A more probable scenario might involve the adoption of the strategy of localization of some of the “European” norms to strengthen the integration process in Southeast Asia.

**Table 1.** The trajectory of localization and conditions for Progress

Prelocalization (resistance and contestation)	Local actors may offer resistance to new external norms because of doubts about the norms’ utility and applicability and fears that the norms might undermine existing beliefs and practices. The contestation may lead to localization if some local actors begin to view the external norms as having a potential to contribute to the legitimacy and efficacy of extant institutions without undermining them significantly.
Local initiative (entrepreneurship and framing)	Local actors borrow and frame external norms in ways that establishes their value to the local audience.
Adaptation (grafting and pruning)	External norms may be reconstructed to fit with local beliefs and practices even as local beliefs and practices may be adjusted in accordance with the external norm. To find this common ground, local actors may redefine the external norm, linking it with specific extant local norms and practices and prune the external norm, selecting those elements which fit the pre-existing normative structure and rejecting those that do not.
Amplification and “universalization”	New instruments and practices are developed from the syncretic, normative framework in which local influences remain highly visible.

Source: A. Acharya, “How ideas spread: Whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian regionalism”, *International Organization* 2004, Vol. 58, p. 251.



In that case, the contestation between emerging transnational norms and pre-existing regional normative and social orders (for example, between the humanitarian intervention and the non-interference in internal affairs) is central to the norm dynamic. Instead of just assessing the existential fit between domestic and outside identity norms and institutions, and explaining strictly dichotomous outcomes of acceptance or rejection, localization describes a complex process and outcome by which norm-takers build congruence between transnational norms (including norms previously institutionalized in a region) and local beliefs and practices. In this process, foreign norms, which may not initially cohere with the latter, are incorporated into local norms. The success of norm diffusion strategies and process depends on the extent to which they provide opportunities for localization. To localize something is to invest it with the characteristics of a particular place. A. Acharya defines localization as an active construction (through discourse, framing, grafting, and cultural selection) of foreign ideas by local actors, which results in the former developing significant congruence with local beliefs and practices.<sup>22</sup> The examples of successful localization strategy in Southeast Asia can be found deep in the history of the region (Table 1).

## 6. Conclusions

Europe's influence on Southeast Asia in terms of hard power is limited. The processes of state-building, linked with the idea of the regional autonomy, together with the memory of a colonial past creates a context, in which Asian countries are suspicious to any possibility of external direct intervention into the regional affairs. At the same time, the vulnerability to external shocks and challenges makes the region potentially open to the exogenous influence. Hence, the EU, mostly perceived by regional elites as a "benign" partner, can support the expansion of its norms on the different levels of interactions. Asians today in terms of their attitude towards, for example, conflict and conflict management (e.g. the EU was active in the resolution of Aceh problem in Indonesia) would seem to be much closer to Europeans than to Americans. But this does not mean that Asians are merely learning from the Europeans. Asia has developed its own approach, independent of European influence. Instead of mimicking Europe's overarching multilateralism, Asia is developing *ad hoc* and problem-specific cooperation, combining bilateral, concerted unilateral and sub-regional approaches.<sup>23</sup> European social identity toward Southeast Asia is a part of the EU global approach to the idea of fostering worldwide the principles and norms that are in the centre of the European experience with regional integration. But it is important to remember that other regions are not the passive recipients of the external norms. But the inter-subjective relations between regions during the

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<sup>22</sup> A. Acharya, "How ideas spread: Whose norms matter? Norm localization and institutional change in Asian regionalism", *International Organization* 2004, Vol. 58, pp. 239-275.

<sup>23</sup> A. Acharya, *Europe and Asia...*, p. 316.

interaction process continuously reinforce previous self-identities and perceptions, and also influence each other. More likely, Southeast Asia will localize some of the international norms, represented by the EU, but not necessarily in the form well known in Europe.

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## **EUROPA I AZJA POŁUDNIOWO-WSCHODNIA: TOŻSAMOŚĆ KORPORACYJNA I SPOŁECZNA. MOŻLIWOŚĆ ROZPRZESTRZENIANIA SIĘ NORM**

**Streszczenie:** Poszczególne teorie stosunków międzynarodowych w odmienny sposób wyjaśniają rolę i pozycję UE i ASEAN. Koncentrując się na konkretnych wyjaśnieniach, wykorzystując własną metodologię i punkty wyjścia, różnią się one w kwestii założeń i wniosków. Społeczny konstruktywizm daje w tym wypadku możliwość zmierzenia się z powyższą problematyką w swoisty sposób, m.in. przez koncentrację na koncepcji tożsamości korporacyjnej i społecznej. Tożsamości te są odpowiedzialne za definiowanie interesów i sposoby zachowania aktorów międzynarodowych. Stąd tożsamość UE i ASEAN wpływa na ich wzajemne relacje, a także wspomaga akceptację/odrzućenie pewnych norm międzynarodowych.