

NO ASIAN CENTURY WITHOUT A PAN-ASIAN INSTITUTION

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For over a decade, many of the relevant academic journals have been full of articles prophesising the 21st century as the Asian century. The argument is usually based on the impressive economic growth, increased production and trade volumes as well as the booming foreign currency reserves and exports of the many populous Asian nations (with nearly 1/3 of the total world population inhabiting just two countries of the world's largest continent). However, history serves as a powerful reminder, warning us that economically or/and demographically mighty gravity centers tend to expand into their peripheries, especially when the periphery is weaker in either category. This means that any (absolute or relative) shift in economic and demographic strength of one subject of international relations will inevitably put additional stress on the existing power equilibriums and constellations that support this balance in the particular theater (implicit or explicit structure).

Thus, what is the state of the art of Asia's security structures? What is the existing capacity of preventive diplomacy, and what instruments are at disposal when it comes to early warning/ prevention, fact-finding, exchange mechanisms, reconciliation, capacity, and confidence-building measures in the Asian theater?

While all other major theaters have had their pan-continental settings in place for many decades already, such as the Organisation of American States (OAS, the American continent), the African Union (AU, Africa), the Council of Europe and the Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE, Europe), the state of the art of the world's largest continent is rather different. What becomes apparent nearly at first glance is the absence of any pan-Asian security/multilateral structure. The prevailing security structures are bilateral and mostly asymmetric. They range from clearly defined and enduring non-aggression

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security treaties, through less formal arrangements, to ad hoc cooperation accords on specific issues. The presence of the multilateral regional settings is limited to but a few spots in the largest continent, and even then, these are rarely mandated with security issues in their declared scope of work. Another striking feature is that most of the existing bilateral structures have an Asian state on one side, and either a peripheral or external protégé country on the other side (which makes them, almost by definition, asymmetric). The examples are numerous: the US–Japan, the US–S. Korea, the US–Singapore, Russia–India, Australia–East Timor, Russia–North Korea, Japan –Malaysia, China–Pakistan, the US–Pakistan, China–Cambodia, the US–Saudi Arabia, Russia–Iran, China–Burma, India–Maldives, Iran–Syria, N. Korea–Pakistan, etc.

Indeed, today Asia resonates a mixed echo of the European past. It combines features of the pre-Napoleonic, post-Napoleonic, and the League-of-Nations Europe. What are the useful lessons from the European past? Well, there are quite a few, for sure. Bismarck accommodated the exponential economic, demographic and military growth as well as the territorial expansion of Prussia by skillfully architecting and calibrating the complex networks of bilateral security arrangements of the 19th century Europe. Like Asia today, it was not an institutionalised security structure of Europe, but rather a talented leadership exercising restraint and wisdom in combination with quick assertiveness and fast military absorptions, concluded by the lasting endurance. However, as soon as the new Kaiser removed the Iron Chancellor (Bismarck), the provincial and backward-minded, insecure and militant Prussian establishment contested (by their own interpretations of the German's *machtpolitik* and *weltpolitik* policies) Europe and the world in two devastating world wars. That, as well as Hitler's establishment afterwards, simply did not know what to do with a powerful Germany.

The aspirations and constellations of some of Asia's powers today remind us also of the pre-Napoleonic Europe, in which a unified, universalistic block of the Holy Roman Empire was contested by the impatient challengers of the status quo. Such serious centripetal and centrifugal oscillations of Europe were not without grave deviations: as much as Cardinal Richelieu's and Jacobin's France successfully emancipated itself, the Napoleon III and pre-WWII France encircled, isolated itself, implicitly laying the foundation for the German attack.

Finally, the existing Asian regional settings also resemble the picture of the post-Napoleonic Europe: first and foremost, of Europe between the Vienna Congress of 1815 and the revolutionary year of 1848. At any rate, let us take a quick look at the most relevant regional settings in Asia.

By far, the largest Asian participation is with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation – APEC, an organisation engulfing both sides of the Pacific Rim. Nevertheless, this is a forum for member economies (not of sovereign nations), a sort of a prep-com or waiting room for the World Trade Organisation (WTO). As one senior Singapore diplomat recently told me the following in Geneva: “What is your option here? ...to sign the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), side up with the US, login to FaceBook, and keep shopping on the internet happily ever after...”

Two other crosscutting settings, the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) (the former with and the latter without a permanent secretariat) represent well-established multilateral political bodies. However, they are inadequate forums as neither of the two is (strictly) mandated with security issues. Although both trans-continental entities do have large memberships (being respectively the 2nd and 3rd largest multilateral systems, right after the UN), neither covers the entire Asian political landscape, having important Asian countries outside the system, or opposing it.

Further on, one should mention the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organisation – KEDO (Nuclear) and the Iran-related Contact (Quartet/P-5+1) Group. In both cases, the issues dealt with are indeed security-related, but they are more an asymmetric approach to deter and contain a single country by the larger front of peripheral states that are opposing a particular security policy, in this case, that of North Korea and that of Iran. The same is true of the short-lived SEATO Pact, a defense treaty organisation for SEA, which was essentially dissolved as soon as the imminent threat from communism has been slowed down and successfully contained within French Indochina.

If some of the settings are reminiscent of pre-Napoleonic Europe, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and Cooperation Council for the Arab states of the Gulf (GCC) remind us of post-Napoleonic Europe and its Alliance of the Eastern Conservative Courts of Metternich. Both arrangements were created under the pretext of a common external (ideological and geopolitical) threat, under a shared status quo security consideration. The

asymmetric GCC was an externally induced setting whereby Saudi Arabia, American key Middle East ally, gathered the grouping of the Arabian Peninsula monarchies. It served a dual purpose: originally, to contain the leftist Nasseristic pan-Arabism, which was introducing a republican type of egalitarian government in the Middle Eastern theater. It was also (after the 1979 Revolution) an instrument to counter-balance the Iranian influence in the Gulf and wider Middle East. The response to the spring 2011 turmoil in the Middle East (including the deployment of the Saudi troops in Bahrain as well as the analysis of the role of the influential Qatar-based and GCC-backed Al Jazeera TV network) is the best proof of the very nature of the GCC mandate.

The SCO is internally induced and is a more symmetric setting. Essentially, it came into existence through a strategic Sino-Russian rapprochement¹ (based, for the first time in modern history, on parity) to deter external aspirants (the US, Japan, Korea, India, Turkey, and Saudi Arabia) and to keep the resources, territory, present socio-political culture, and political regime in Central Asia, Tibet heights, and the Xinjiang Uighur province in line.

¹ An analysis of the Sino-Soviet and post-Soviet-Sino relations tempts me to compare them with the Antic Roman Empire. The monolithic block has entered its fragmentation on a seemingly rhetoric, clerical question of who would give the exclusive interpretation of the holy text: Rome or Constantinople. Clearly, the one who holds the monopoly on the interpretation has the ideological grip, which can easily be translated into a strategic advantage. It was Moscow insisting that the Soviet type of communism was the only true and authentic communism. A great schism put to an end the lasting theological (but also geopolitical) conflict in the antique Roman theatre. The Sino-Soviet schism culminated with the ideological and geopolitical emancipation of China (especially after the Nixon recognition of Beijing China). Besides the ideological cleavages, the socio-economic and political model of the Roman Empire has been heavily contested from the 3rd century onwards. The Western Roman Empire rigidly persisted to any structural change, unable to adapt. It eroded and soon thereafter vanished from the political map. The Eastern Empire successfully reformed and Byzantium endured (as a viable socio-economic and political model) for another 1,000 years. Feeling the need for an urgent reshape of the declining communist system, both leaders Gorbachev and Deng Xiaoping contemplated reforms. Gorbachev eventually fractured the Soviet Union with glasnost and perestroika. Deng managed China successfully. Brave, accurate, and important argumentation comes from diplomat and prolific author Kishore Mahbubani (*The New Asian Hemisphere*, 2008, page 44-45). Mahbubani claims that Gorbachev handed over the Soviet empire and got nothing in return, while Deng understood “the real success of Western strength and power ... China did not allow the students protesting in Tiananmen Square”. Consequently, Deng drew a sharp and decisive line to avoid the fate of Russia, and allowed only perestroika. China has survived, even scoring the unprecedented prosperity in only the last two decades. Russia has suffered a steep decline in the aftermath of the loss of its historic empire (including the high suicide and crime rates as well as the severe alcohol problems). Gorbachev himself moved to the US, and one vodka brand labels his name.

The next to consider is the grouping of the Indian sub-continent, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation – SAARC. This organisation has a well-established mandate, a well-staffed and versed Secretariat. However, the Organisation is strikingly reminiscent of the League of Nations. The League is remembered as an altruistic setup which repeatedly failed to adequately respond to the security quests of its members as well as to the challenges and pressures of the parties that were kept out of the system (e.g., Russia until well into the 1930s and the US remaining completely outside the system; and, in the case of the SAARC surrounding, China, Saudi Arabia, and the US). The SAARC is practically a hostage of the mega confrontation of its two largest members - both confirmed nuclear powers, India and Pakistan. These two challenge each other geopolitically and ideologically (the existence of one is a negation of the existence of the other; the religiously determined nationhood of Pakistan is a negation of multi-ethnic India and vice versa). In addition, although internally induced, the SAARC is an asymmetric organisation. It is not only the size of India, but also its position: the centrality of that country makes the SAARC practically unable to operate in any field without the direct consent of India (be it commerce, communication, politics, or security).

For a serious advancement of multilateralism, mutual trust, a will to compromise and achieve a common denominator through active co-existence is the key. It is hard to build a common course of action around a disproportionately big and centrally positioned member (which would escape the interpretation as containment by the big or assertiveness of its center by the smaller, peripheral members).

Finally, there is the ASEAN – a grouping of 10 Southeast Asian nations², exercising the balanced multi-vector policy (based on the principle of non-interference) internally and externally. This Jakarta/Indonesia headquartered³ organisation has a dynamic past and an ambitious current charter. It is an internally induced and relatively symmetric arrangement with the strongest members placed around its geographic centre (like in case of the EU equilibrium with Germany, France/Britain-Italy/Poland-Spain geographically balance each

² The membership might be extended in the future to East Timor and Papua New Guinea.

³ Symbolically or not, the ASEAN HQ is located less than 80 miles away from the place of the historical, the NAM-precursor, the Asian-African Conference of Bandung 1955.

other). Situated on the geographic axis of the southern flank of the Asian landmass, the so-called growth triangle of Thailand-Malaysia-Indonesia represents the core of the ASEAN not only in economic and communication terms, but also by its political leverage. The EU-like ASEAN Community Road Map (for 2015) will absorb most of the Organisation's energy⁴. However, the ASEAN has managed to open its forums for the 3+3 group/s, and in the long run, could be seen as a cumulus setting towards the wider pan-Asian forum in the future.

Before closing this brief overview, let us mention two recently inaugurated informal forums, both based on the external calls for burden sharing. One, with a jingoistic-coined name by the Wall Street bankers⁵ - BRI(I)C/S - so far includes two important Asian economic, demographic, and political powerhouses (India and China), and one peripheral (Russia). Indonesia, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, and Iran are a few additional Asian countries whose national pride and pragmatic interests are advocating BRIC membership. The G-20, the other informal forum, is also assembled on the ad hoc (pro bono) basis following the need of the G-7 to achieve a larger approval and support for its monetary (currency exchange accord) and financial (austerity) actions introduced in the aftermath of the (still unsettled) financial crisis. Nevertheless, the BRIC and G-20 have not provided the Asian participating states with the more leverage in the Bretton Woods institutions (besides burden sharing). Nor have they helped to tackle the indigenous Asian security problems. Appealing to national pride, however, both informal gatherings may divert the necessary resources and attention from their pressing domestic, pan-continental issues to the Asian states.

⁴ Comparisons pose inaccuracy risks, as history often finds a way to repeat itself, but optimism ultimately prevails. Tentatively, we can situate ASEAN today, where the pre-Maastricht EU was between the Merge Treaty and the Single European Act.

⁵ The acronym was originally coined by Jim O'Neill, a chief global economist of Goldman Sachs, in his 2001 document report: "Building Better Global Economic BRICs". This document elaborated on countries which may provide the West with the socially, economically, and politically cheap primary commodities and undemanding labor force, finally suggesting to the West to balance such trade by exporting its high-priced final products in return. The paper did not foresee either the creation of any BRIC grouping; nor did it account for the nomadic change of venue places of its periodic meetings. O'Neill initially tipped Brazil, Russia, India, and China, although at recent meetings South Africa was invited (BRICS) with Indonesia pending (BRIICS).

Yet, besides the UN system machinery of the Geneva-based Disarmament committee, the UN Security Council, the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), and even the ASEAN Asians (as the most multilateralised Asians) have no suitable standing forum to tackle and solve their security issues. An organisation similar to the Council of Europe or the OSCE is still far from emerging on Asian soil.

Our history warns. Nevertheless, it also provides a hope: the pre-CSCE (pre-Helsinki) Europe was indeed a dangerous place to live in. The sharp geopolitical and ideological default line was passing through the very heart of Europe, cutting it into halves. Southern Europe was virtually sealed off by notorious dictatorships in Greece (Colonel Junta), Spain (Franco), and Portugal (Salazar), with Turkey witnessing several of its governments toppled by the secular and omnipotent military establishment, with inverted Albania, and a (non-Europe minded) non-allied Tito's Yugoslavia. Two powerful instruments in Europe, the US military presence (NATO) on the one hand, and the Soviets (the Warsaw Pact) on the other, were keeping huge standing armies, enormous stockpiles of conventional as well as the ABC weaponry and delivery systems, practically next to each other. By and large, European borders were not mutually recognised. Essentially, the West refused to even recognise many of the Eastern European (Soviet dominated/installed) governments.

Currently there is hardly a single state in Asia which has no territorial dispute within its neighborhood. Across Middle East, Caspian and Central Asia, Indian sub-continent, mainland Indochina or Archipelago SEA, Tibet, the South China Sea, and the Far East, many countries are suffering numerous green and blue border disputes. The South China Sea alone accounts for over a dozen territorial disputes – in which (mostly) China presses peripheries to break free from the long-lasting encirclement. These moves are often interpreted by the neighbors as dangerous assertiveness. On the top of that Sea resides Taiwan, a huge economy and insular territory in a legal limbo, which waits for the time when the pan-Asian and international agreement on how many Chinas Asia should have gains a wide and lasting consensus.

Unsolved territorial issues, sporadic irredentism, conventional armament, nuclear ambitions, conflicts over exploitation of and access to the marine biota as well as other natural resources, including fresh water access and supply, are

posing enormous stress on external security, safety, and stability in Asia. Additional stress comes from the newly emerging environmental concerns representing nearly absolute security threats (not only to the tiny Pacific nation of Tuvalu⁶, but also) to the Maldives, Bangladesh, Cambodia, parts of Thailand, of Indonesia, of Kazakhstan and of the Philippines, etc⁷. All this combined with uneven economic and demographic dynamics⁸ of the continent portrays Asia as a real powder keg.

It is absolutely inappropriate to compare the size of Asia and Europe (the latter being rather an extension of a huge Asian continental landmass, a sort of western Asian peninsula), but the interstate maneuvering space is comparable. Yet, the space between the major powers of post-Napoleonic Europe was as equally narrow for any maneuver as is the space today for any security maneuver of Japan, China, India, Pakistan, Iran, and the like.

Let us also take a brief look at the peculiarities of the nuclear constellations in Asia. Following the historic analogies, it echoes the age of the American nuclear monopoly and the years of Russia's desperation to achieve parity.

Besides holding huge stockpiles of conventional weaponry and numerous standing armies, Asia is a home of four (plus peripheral Russia and Israel) of the nine known nuclear powers (declared and undeclared). Only China and Russia are parties to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). North Korea walked

⁶ Tuvalu, a country composed of low-lying atoll islands, faces an imminent complete loss of state territory. This event would mark a precedent in the theory of intl. law, viz., the fact that one country suffers a complete geographic loss of its territory.

⁷ Detailed environmental impact risk assessments (including the no-go zones) are available in the CRESTA reports. The CRESTA Organisation is powered by the Swiss RE as a consortium of the leading insurance and reinsurance companies.

⁸ The intriguing intellectual debate is currently heating up the western world. The issues are fundamental: why is science turned into religion? (Practiced economy is based on the over 200-years old liberal theory of Adam Smith and over 300-years old philosophy of Hobbes and Locke – basically, frozen and rigidly canonised into a dogmatic exegesis. Scientific debate is replaced by a blind obedience.) Why is religion turned into political ideology (religious texts are misinterpreted and ideologically misused in Europe, ME, Asia, Americas and Africa)? Why is the (secular or religious) ethics turned from the bio-centric comprehension into the anthropocentric environmental ignorance? The resonance of these vital debates is gradually reaching Asian elites. No one can yet predict the range and scope of their responses, internally or externally. One is certain: Asia has understood that the global (economic) integration cannot be a substitute for any viable development strategy. Globalisation, as experienced in Asia and observed elsewhere, did not offer a shortcut to development, even less to social cohesion, environmental needs, domestic employment, educational uplift of the middle class, and general public health.

away in 2003, whereas India and Pakistan both confirmed nuclear powers declined to sign the Treaty. In addition, Asia is the only continent on which nuclear weaponry has been deployed.

As is well known, the peak of the Cold War was marked by the mega geopolitical and ideological confrontation of the two nuclear superpowers (whose stockpiles by far outnumbered the stockpiles of all the other nuclear powers combined). However enigmatic, mysterious, and incalculable to each other⁹, the Americans and the Soviets were on the opposite sides of the globe; they had no territorial disputes, and no record of direct armed conflicts.

Insofar, the Asian nuclear constellation is additionally specific, as each of the holders has a history of hostilities – armed frictions and confrontations over unsolved territorial disputes along the shared borders, all combined with the intensive and lasting ideological rivalries. The Soviet Union had bitter transborder armed frictions with China over the demarcation of its long land border. China has fought a war with India and has acquired a significant territorial gain. India has fought four mutually extortive wars with Pakistan over Kashmir and other disputed bordering regions. Finally, the Korean peninsula has witnessed direct military confrontation from Japan, USSR, China, and the US on its own soil, and remains a split nation under a sharp ideological divide.

⁹ The Soviet Union was enveloped in secrecy (a political culture, eminent in many large countries, which the Soviets inherited from the Tsarist Russia and further enhanced), a feature that puzzled Americans. It was the US cacophony of open, nearly exhibitionistic policy debates that puzzled Russians – and made both sides unable to predict the moves of the other one. The Soviets were confused by the omnipresence of overt political debate in the US, and the Americans were confused by the absence of any political debate in the USSR. Americans knew well that the real power resided outside the government, in the Soviet Politburo. Still, it was like a black-box (to use a vivid Kissinger allegory), things were coming in and getting out, but nobody figured out what was happening inside. Once the particular decision had been taken, the Soviets implemented it persistently in a heavy-handed and rigid way. Usually policy alternation/adjustment was not coming before personal changes at the top of the SU Politburo – events happening so seldom. On the other hand, the Soviets were confused by the equidistant constellation of the US executive, legislative, and judicial branches (for the Soviet taste, changed too often), the chaotic setup of dozens of intelligence and other enforcement agencies, the role of the media and the public, and the influential lobby groups that crosscut the US bipartisanship – which all participated in the decision prep and making process. Even when brokered, the US actions were often altered or replaced in zigzagging turns. The US was unable to grasp where the Communist Party ended and the USSR government started. By the same token, the Soviets were unable to figure out where the corporate America ended and the US government started. Paradoxically enough, the political culture of one prevented it from comprehending and predicting the actions of the other. What was the logical way for one was absolutely unthinkable and illogical for the other.

On the western edge of the Eurasian continent, neither France, Britain, Russia, nor the US have had a (recent) history of direct armed conflicts. They do not even share land borders.

Finally, only India and now post-Soviet Russia have a strict and full civilian control over their military and the nuclear deployment authorisation. In the case of North Korea and China, it is in the hands of an unpredictable and non-transparent communist leadership – meaning, it resides outside democratic and governmental decision-making. In Pakistan, it is completely in the hands of a politically omnipresent military establishment. Pakistan has lived under a direct military rule for over half of its existence as an independent state.

What eventually kept the US and the USSR from deploying nuclear weapons was the dangerous and costly struggle called “mutual assured destruction”. Already by the late 1950s, both sides had achieved parity on the number and type of nuclear warheads as well as on the number and precision of their delivery systems. Both sides produced enough warheads, delivery systems’ secret depots, and launching sites to amply survive the first impact and to maintain a strong second-strike capability¹⁰. Once comprehending that neither the preventive, nor preemptive nuclear strike would bring a decisive victory, but would actually trigger the final global nuclear holocaust and ensure total mutual destruction, the Americans and the Soviets ultimately achieved a fear–equilibrium through the hazardous deterrence. Thus, it was not an intended parity, but the non-intended Mutual Assured Destruction, MAD (with its tranquilising effect of nuclear weaponry, if possessed in sufficient quantities and impenetrable configurations), that brought a bizarre sort of pacifying stability between the two confronting superpowers. Hence, MAD prevented nuclear war, but did not disarm the superpowers.

As noted, the nuclear stockpiles in Asia are considerably modest¹¹. The number of warheads, launching sites, and delivery systems is not sufficient and sophisticated enough to offer the second strike capability. This fact seriously compromises both stability and security: a preventive or preemptive N–strike

¹⁰ As Waltz rightfully concludes, “Conventional weapons put a premium on striking first to gain the initial advantage and set the course of the war. Nuclear weapons eliminate this premium. The initial advantage is insignificant...”... due to the second strike capability of both belligerents. (‘The Spread of Nuclear Weapons: A Debate Renewed’ by Scott D. Sagan and Kenneth N Waltz, 2003, p. 112).

¹¹ It is assumed that Pakistan has as few as 20 combat/launching ready fission warheads, India is believed to have some 60, and Korea (if any, but not more than) only 2-3. Even China, considered as the senior nuclear state, has not more than 20 ICBM.

against a nuclear or non-nuclear state could be contemplated as decisive, especially in South Asia and on the Korean peninsula, not to mention the Middle East¹².

General wisdom of geopolitics assumes the potentiality of threat by examining the degree of intensions and capability of belligerents. However, in Asia, this theory does not necessarily hold the complete truth: close geographic proximities of Asian nuclear powers mean shorter flight time of warheads, which ultimately gives a very brief decision-making period to adversaries engaged. Besides a deliberate danger, a serious danger of an accidental nuclear war is therefore evident.

Erich Fromm, one of the greatest thinkers and humanists of the 20th century, wrote: "...man can only go forward by developing (his) reason, by finding a new harmony..."¹³

There is certainly a long road from vision and wisdom to a clear political commitment and accorded action. However, once these have been achieved, the operational tools are readily at disposal. The case of Helsinki Europe is very instructive. To be frank, it was the over-extension of the superpowers who contested one another all over the globe, which eventually brought them to the negotiation table. Importantly, it was also a constant, resolute call of the European public that alerted governments on both sides of the default line. Once the political considerations had been settled, the technicalities gained momentum: there was – at first – mutual pan-European recognition of borders which tranquilised tensions literally overnight. Politico-military cooperation was situated in the so-called first Helsinki basket, which included joint military inspections, exchange mechanisms, constant information flow, early warning instruments, a mechanism of confidence-building measures, and the standing panel of state representatives (the so-called Permanent Council). Further on, an important clearing house was situated in the so-called

¹² Israel (as a non-declared nuclear power) is believed to have as many as 200 low-powered fission nuclear bombs. Half of them are deliverable by the mid-range missile Jericho II, planes, and mobile (hide and relocate) launchers. Iran has successfully tested the precision of its mid-range missile and keeps ambitiously working on the generation of long-range missiles. At the same time, Iran may well have acquired some vital dual-use (so far, peaceful purpose) nuclear technologies. There is a seed of nuclear ambition all over the Middle East (with Saudi Arabia and Turkey being the least shy ones).

¹³ "The Art of Loving", Erich Fromm, 1956, page 76. Fromm wrote it at about the time of the Bandung conference.

second basket – the forum that links economic and environmental issues, items so pressing in Asia at the moment.

Admittedly, the III OSCE Basket has been a source of many controversies in the past years, mostly over the interpretation of mandates. However, the new wave of nationalism (often replacing the fading communism), the emotional charges and residual fears of the past, the huge ongoing formation of the middle class in Asia (whose passions and affiliations will inevitably challenge the established elites domestically and question their policies internationally), and a related search for a new social consensus – all that could be successfully tackled by some sort of an Asian III basket. Clearly, further socio-economic growth in Asia is impossible without the creation and mobilisation of a strong middle class – a segment of society which, when appearing anew on the socio-political horizon, is traditionally very exposed and vulnerable to political misdeeds and disruptive shifts. At any rate, there are several OSCE observing nations from Asia¹⁴; from Thailand to Korea and Japan (with Indonesia, a nation that currently considers joining the forum). They are clearly benefiting from the participation¹⁵.

Consequently, the largest continent should consider the creation of its own comprehensive pan-Asian multilateral mechanism. In doing so, it can surely rest on the vision and spirit of Helsinki. As regards the very institutional setup, Asia can closely revisit the well-envisioned SAARC and the ambitiously empowered ASEAN¹⁶ forums. By examining these two regional bodies, Asia

¹⁴ The so-called OSCE–Asian Partners for Cooperation are: Japan (1992), Korea (1994), Thailand (2000), Afghanistan (2003), Mongolia (2004) and Australia (2009). Within the OSCE quarters, particularly Thailand and Japan enjoy a reputation of being very active.

¹⁵ It is likely to expect that five other ASEAN countries, residually represented in Vienna, may formalise their relation with OSCE in due time. The same move could be followed by the Secretariats of both SAARC and ASEAN.

¹⁶ In Europe and in Asia (even when being at the HQ in Jakarta), I am often asked to clarify my (overly) optimistic views on the ASEAN future prospects. The ASEAN, as well as the EU, simply have no alternative, but to survive and turn successful (although currently suffering many deficiencies and being far from optimised multilateral mechanisms). Any alternative to the EU is a grand accommodation of either France or Germany with Russia – meaning a return to Europe of the 18th, 19th, and early 20th centuries – namely, perpetual wars and destructions. Any alternative to the ASEAN would be an absorptive accommodation of particular ASEAN member states to either Japan, or China, or India – meaning fewer large blocks on a dangerous collision course. Thus, paradoxically enough, in the cases of both the EU and ASEAN, it is not (only) the inner capacitation, but the external constellations that make me optimistic about their respective success.

can find and skillfully calibrate the appropriate balance between widening and deepening the (security) mandate of such future multilateral organisation, given the number of states as well as the gravity of the pressing socio-political, environmental and politico-military challenges.

In the age of unprecedented success and unparalleled prosperity of Asia, an indigenous multilateral pan-Asian arrangement presents itself as an opportunity. Contextualising Hegel's famous saying that "freedom is...an insight into necessity" let me close by stating that a need for the domesticated pan-Asian organisation warns by its urgency, too.

Clearly, there is no emancipation of the continent; there is no Asian century without a pan-Asian multilateral setting.

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