

ASEM Tenth Anniversary *

SASTROHANDOYO WIRYONO VL

ASEF's Governor for Indonesia

Abstrak

Asia tidak memiliki kesatuan budaya mendasar seperti Eropa, yang dalam berperangpun melakukan "cultural interpenetration" dan menumbuhkan "we feeling" yang kuat, suatu hal yang masih harus terjadi di Asia. Namun kedua belah pihak baik Asia maupun Eropa adalah multikultural. Lagipula proses integrasi di Asia sedang terus berkembang seperti tampak dengan adanya proses "ASEAN +3", gagasan mencapai ASEAN Community ditahun 2020 dan diselenggarakannya East Asia Summit. Proses reformasi dan demokratisasi juga terus bergulir sehingga akhirnya Asia akan menyerupai Eropa, dan Eropa pun —dengan semakin besarnya migrasi dari Dunia Ketiga— akan menyerupai Asia dalam keanekaragamannya. Bagaimanapun, Asia dan Eropa adalah dua kawasan yang dapat berinteraksi yang saling menguntungkan. Yang perlu dilakukan adalah agar dapat berkomunikasi secara sehat. Eropa tak perlu terlalu bersemangat/menggurui dalam memproyeksikan nilai-nilainya. Asia tidak perlu terlalu defensif atau terlalu mengeluh bila menerima kritik. Kalau Asia dan Eropa mampu mengembangkan ASEM menjadi suatu forum kerjasama yang kuat, maka dunia yang triangular Asia-Eropa-Amerika akan menjadi lebih damai dan stabil.

Keywords: history, (post) colonizations, international politics and economy, communism, terrorism, cultural interpretations, economy

A decade old, ASEM is one of the most important interregional processes going on in the world today. As a forum for dialogue and cooperation on the basis of equality, mutual respect and mutual benefit, ASEM is still largely informal. Its modalities and procedures have not yet been

fully institutionalized, but in the years ahead there may arise a felt need for these to be firmed up if only to improve on the present modest pace of its development.

Various factors and realities will have to be taken into consideration in the course of the institutional development of ASEM. These include the historical context of the relations between Europe and Asia. Relations between Europe and Asia can be

* This article also published at the book *10 Tahun ASEM: Dinamika Hubungan Asia-Eropa*, Departmen Luar Negeri RI, 2006

traced back to the 16th century when Europeans first came in force to our part of the world. For Asia, this was not an auspicious beginning.

Even at that time, Asia already had two giants India and China, which exerted immense cultural influence on the rest of the region just as today they are exerting economic influence on the rest of Asia. Most of the continent comprised of kingdoms that were trading and interacting or at war with one another, some of them vanishing into oblivion while new kingdoms rose in their place. Such strife made it so much easier for the European powers to conquer and colonize them. Thus came about several centuries that constituted the colonial period in Asia. Colonial rule was neither altogether benign nor outright evil. One aspect of the era of colonialism that is still very much in the collective memory of Asian countries is the way the continent became an arena of fierce rivalries and even conflicts among Western powers.

Although to a considerable degree characterized by crass exploitation, colonial rule had its beneficial side. It was, for instance, a modernizing influence. The colonial administrators brought over to Asia their achievements in science and technology, transplanted to Asian soil their educational and bureaucratic systems as well as inevitably "dangerous" political ideas that eventually brought about the undoing of the regimes they

served. Many of the leaders of the Asian nationalist movements did not only develop their agendas in their own native countries but also in the academic centers of Europe where they studied. Most of the leaders of Indonesia after proclamation of independence were former members of the Indonesian Students Association in the Netherlands.

The Asian nationalist movement began in the late 19th century with the Philippines leading the way and gained momentum with the defeat of the Russian army by Japan at the turn of the century. Soon there were robust nationalist movements in India, China and Indonesia and the rest of Southeast Asia. By the time that the continent was recovering from the ravages of the Second World War, most of the former colonies had already won their independence, many of them through parliamentary struggle, some others such as Indonesia by revolution.

The post-colonial era overlapped with the advent of the Cold War, which saw the Asian countries not only struggling to lift themselves from the morass of underdevelopment but also maneuvering through the Cold War. The Western powers, largely the United States in the beginning and later by other developed countries, extended a helping hand in the form of aid for development. At that time, however, the greatest concern of the Western powers in our part of the

world was not the development of the regional countries but the containment, if not the defeat, of international communism. Economic aid was motivated and given in the framework of fighting communism.

There was considerable rhetoric about promoting democracy but it was the perception of many recipients of aid that the real motive was to prevail in the rivalry with the communist bloc. The Soviet Union was doing precisely the same thing: establishing spheres of influence through the extension of aid. Two anti-communist wars were fought by the Western powers in Asia during this period, the first on the Korean peninsula under the banner of the United Nations, and the second in a losing struggle in Indochina against nationalist forces that brought about, among other things, the unification of Vietnam.

The Cold War lasted about four decades, ending in the early 1990s with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the fall of the Berlin Wall. By then, Asia had become a hodge-podge of political systems living alongside each other with varying degrees of mutual tolerance: communist regimes looked across their borders at unabashedly capitalist democracies and pro-Western authoritarian regimes.

The second half of the Cold War saw the rise of regional organizations in Asia, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and

the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). The external relations of ASEAN were in the form of dialogue partnerships with countries and international institutions that had a stake in the region.

The only regional organization, so far, that has a dialogue partnership with ASEAN is the European Union, which had by this time achieved considerable integration economically and politically. That partnership began in the 1970s when the Union was still known as the European Community. It has occasioned the pursuit of various joint projects that have contributed and are contributing to the social and economic development of the Southeast Asian sub-region. Since these projects are attendant to a dialogue partnership, they are not perceived as tools of a Cold War agenda and have only the most positive connotations.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the breakdown of communism in Europe and Central Asia during the late 1980s, the Cold War ended, ushering in a new era in which there was only one superpower, the United States. The new situation raised a great deal of hope if only because the NATO was no longer ranged against a threatening communist bloc. It also made possible the integration of former members of the communist bloc with mainstream Europe.

By that time, it had become apparent that the export-driven economies of East Asia, in general, had undergone about two decades of phenomenal economic growth, thanks largely to the unflagging confidence of the American consumer. However the overly expansive East Asian economies turned out to be fragile and their "economic miracle" turned out to be a bubble, which burst with the advent of the Asian financial and economic crisis of 1997 and 1998.

The negative effects of the Asian crisis were felt all over the world, as various non-Asian economies, notably Russia, suffered the contagion. Among the severely affected economies, that of Indonesia was the most thoroughly devastated, but the trauma of the crisis launched us on the road to reform and democratization. Perhaps for the same reason, there developed a clamor for transparency and accountability in governance all over Asia.

We had barely recovered from the rigors of the Asian crisis when the world suffered another, deeper trauma: the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, in the heartland of the United States. When this carnage was followed by the terrorist bombing on Bali island in which over 200 individuals, mostly tourists, were killed, it became clear that no society was safe from the deadly threat of international terrorism. Since then the Taliban regime in Afghanistan has

been ousted by force, Iraq has been invaded and the world has never been the same.

This is one fundamental reality that has to be taken into consideration in shaping the future institutionalized interaction between Europe and Asia: we have a new world disorder. We are all learning how to cope with, let alone eradicate, the threat of terrorism. In this regard, no leader or country is master of policy. We are all treading uncharted waters and subject to events that are still largely unpredictable and uncontrollable.

Terrorism poses a direct and obvious threat to life and property. It also erodes the morale of society and wreaks havoc on sectors of the economy like investment and tourism. Apart from all these, there is also the insidious danger that the agenda for development may be once more eclipsed – as was the case during the Cold War by the issue of communism, this time by the issue of terrorism. The Western powers may once again link development assistance and cooperation to the issue of terrorism, or neglect development altogether in order to focus on terrorism.

Another fundamental reality that must not escape consideration is the immense variety of Asia. Just to give you an idea of how diverse is the continent of Asia, let me give you some statistics about Indonesia. It is an archipelago of 17,000 islands with a population of 220 million divided

into over a thousand ethnic groups speaking some 300 languages. I am told that in one province, Papua, two villages living side by side speak two entirely different languages, which nobody else in the province understands. And yet Indonesia is barely 12 percent of the whole Asian region.

The variety of Asia, in terms of culture, economies, and political systems, is almost infinite. Even a small city-state like Singapore has to make a vigorous, government-led effort to manage the variety of cultures that are competing for dominance in the national life. We often like to cite such variety as an advantage, even a form of wealth. But in this age of globalization, when regional integration is an imperative, we are not so sure that it is an advantage.

That is why not a few thoughtful Asians look to Europe with a wish that the remarkable achievements of the European nations could be transplanted to Asia: Europe has an integrated defense and security system, a common market with a single currency, a supranational legislature and government, and although delayed for the time being will have a constitution. Hence, these thoughtful Asians often ask the question: Why can't Asia accomplish the same kind of integration.

And the answer invariably is: We Asians do not have the same essential and basic unity with which the peoples

of Europe are blessed with. For centuries two of the greatest nations of Asia, Japan and China isolated themselves from each other and from the rest of the world. And for about four centuries, the other countries of Asia were isolated from one another by Western colonial administrators. It was only toward the middle of the 20th century that we began to be really aware of one another, and we had to go through a wide learning curve before we could effectively cooperate with one another.

Europe's case was quite the opposite: over the millennia, there was a great deal of cultural interpenetration among European nations. Even when European nations were making war against each other, they were absorbing from each other, contributing to each others cultural formation. That is why the draft European constitution can define European ness in terms of the influence of Roman law, Christian mutuality, liberal democracy, and the principles and ideals derived from the Age of Enlightenment.

Of course, these delineations are not so clear today, considering the massive migrations into Europe from Africa and Asia that have added to the variety that the continent already enjoys. For, of course, there is no denying that Europe has also always been multi-ethnic and multicultural. Nor have Europeans forgotten their national identities in the process of

forming a European identity.

In the end I think that Europe, while staying economically integrated and politically coordinated, will become more and more like Asia in the vastness of its variety. And in the end, that will only enrich Europe and make it more capable of coming to grips with the challenges that it is facing.

And I like to think that Asia, on the other hand, will become more and more like Europe through a process of formal economic integration and coordination in the political and security sphere. The evidence for this is very clear in the determined efforts of ASEAN to become one free trade and investment area, and to economically combine with its Northeast Asian neighbors through the ASEAN + 3 process.

There is a great deal of networking going on in Asia today. The ASEAN Leaders have decided to work for the achievement by 2020 of an ASEAN Community resting on three pillars: an ASEAN Security Community, an ASEAN Economic Community and an ASEAN Socio-cultural Community. Within a decade there will be a free trade area between ASEAN and China and free trade areas with South Korea and Japan within about the same period.

The dialogue between ASEAN and India should lead, beyond technical cooperation, to greater economic engagement, possibly another free

trade area. There is also talk in ASEAN circles about the possible formation of an East Asia community, an idea sponsored by Malaysia and Japan. The nature of this projected East Asia community and how it relates to the current ASEAN+3 (China, Japan and South Korea) process is a subject of ongoing discussion.

Now, Australia and New Zealand are so much more welcome to ASEAN cooperation processes. Both countries and India were at the East Asia Summit in Kuala Lumpur in 2005. This could lead to more earnest negotiations toward closer economic cooperation between ASEAN and its two long-time dialogue partners in the South Pacific.

It may take quite some time, but the countries of Asia are bound to get more committed to individual liberties and human rights, not because they have suddenly embraced the philosophies of Locke, Hobbes and Grotius, but because Asian countries need to liberate the energies and creativity of their peoples, and that require some degree of libertarianism. The world is beginning to recognize that a flowering of the democratic spirit is taking place in East Asia. This has been described by the international press, notably by *The Economist*, as a "democratic miracle," the political counterpart of the East Asian "economic miracle" that took place in the 1970s and 1980s. The

"democratic miracle" is likely to be more enduring than its erstwhile economic counterpart.

There is, however, the case of Myanmar, which continues to apply an iron fist on the political opposition, while foisting a roadmap to democracy to an incredulous world. There is a possibility that the views of the Asian partners on Myanmar will ultimately coincide with those of the European partners in ASEM, as they get tired of the intransigence of the ruling military in Myanmar. Already, there is talk in ASEAN circles that if Myanmar does not show any credible signs of softening, such as the release of opposition leader Aung San Sukyi from detention, the Association might be taking stronger actions than the skipping of the ASEAN chairmanship of Myanmar.

This ferment for democratization, I am sure, can be hastened through the broadening and strengthening of Asians engagement with Europe through ASEM. Asia and Europe make a perfect match: the strength of each side complements that of the other. There is therefore a great deal to be gained by both sides in strengthening this important and valuable linkage.

Asia today is reaching out in all directions. It is maintaining a strong link with the Americas and the South Pacific through the APEC forum. This is a combination of North-South and South-South cooperation. Unfortunately, the issue of terrorism once again

hijacked the trade promotion and liberalization agenda of the forum during the APEC Economic Leaders Meeting (AELM) in Chile.

Indonesia and South Africa were co-hosting the summit conference of Asian and African nations, which coincide with the observance of the Golden Jubilee of the Asian-African Conference in Bandung in 1955. The idea is to build a bridge of goodwill and cooperation a large part of it being economic cooperation across the Indian Ocean between Asia and Africa. It was a landmark in the history of South-South cooperation.

But Asia's strongest North-South cooperation will be its engagement with the European Union and that is why we in Asia should attach as great an importance to this linkage as to any other. For Europe, the current global situation presents a set of important opportunities in Asia. There is the opportunity to make a significant contribution to global security, particularly in the fight against terror, by teaming up Asian countries already in the forefront of this struggle, like Indonesia, the Philippines, Malaysia and Thailand. Coordinating with Asian countries, Europe can the better protect its own flanks against local "franchises" of the international terrorist network?

The economic opportunities have always been considerable and are expanding. Asia has three giants that are likely to be among the most

dominant in the economic life of this century India, China and Japan. To these three, a fourth would like to join and that is ASEAN, and if all four manage to form a single economic bloc, and that is a distinct possibility, they could form the most formidable economic grouping in history.

No less significant is the opportunity to contribute to the growth of democracy and good governance. Europe must continue to engage Asia politically and culturally while it expands its economic engagement. Indeed, for both sides, there is a huge opportunity for the cultivation of trust. Both must learn to communicate more effectively with each other. Europe must be able to show that it is

not too aggressive in projecting its values, while Asia must guard against looking too defensive about its own values. One should not preach too much, while the other should not complain too much. And there can never be too much dialogue or too much building of linkages.

And if Asia and Europe, through an enhanced ASEM process, can intensify and elevate their dialogue and strengthen their linkages, the ultimate winner will be the human race. With the Asia-Europe partnership attaining its full potential, the benefits will spill over to other places. We should have a much better world of peace and stability and equitably distributed prosperity. □

