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**Northeast Asia:
Obstacles to Regional
Integration**

The Interests of the
European Union

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Northeast Asia: Obstacles to Regional Integration

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I.

Northeast Asia is a paradoxical region. While its economic dynamism provides global stability, its geopolitical conflicts generate global uncertainty. No other region in the world is oscillating between a truly 21st century aspiration to define, master and promote globalization based on technological achievements and a 19th century type of geopolitical parameters coupled with an irritating set of “left-overs” from 20th century regime controversies over totalitarian rule and strategic antagonisms defined by the era of the Cold War. While a lot of energy has been spend to develop recommendations for viable mechanisms of regional integration in Northeast Asia – including the valuable distinction between economic regionalism, political regionalism, and security regionalism¹ - much less attention has been given to an honest analysis of the obstacles to it.

This effort must begin with a sober definition of the type of regional integration one has in mind. As for the European Union, regional integration means the supranational pooling of sovereignty, a law-based and politically-driven form of multi-level governance and an increasing political role

1 See Christopher M. Dent, “Introduction: Northeast Asia – A Region in Search of Regionalism?”, *Northeast Asian Regionalism. Learning from the European Experience*, eds. Christopher M. Dent/David W.F.Huang, London: Routledge, 2002:1-15.

based on the strength of a common market. Whether or not the European experience can or should be emulated elsewhere is, of course, a matter of debate. But to assess the conditions of Northeast Asia from a European perspective will always have this European experience in mind. European Regional integration might follow contingent methods and goals. There is no one-dimensional logic of regional integration. But successful regional integration must be a win-win-situation for all its constituent members. Cooperation can bring together conflicting parties for a limited purpose and a precisely framed scope of common interests. Cooperation can become sustainable, but it can also be dissolved after having achieved its goal or exhausted its time. Integration requires the inner transformation of the constituent members of an integration scheme in order to become viable and lasting. Integration requires the transformation from cooperation by choice to commonality by destiny. This has not happened in Northeast Asia yet.

So far, Northeast Asia has remained outside the global trend of regional integration formation, along with the Greater Middle East. Both regions are light years apart as far as their socio-political, cultural and economic realities are concerned. But they are united in sharing the absence of noticeable and thorough efforts to establish forms and goals of regional integration. They are united in the obvious inability of bringing the countries of the respective region together under the umbrella of a scheme of increasingly shared destiny and interest, commonality and joint outlook on the world at large. Northeast Asia is dominating the world's headlines with impressive results of its economic dynamics: Japan, China and South Korea generated 4 per cent of the world's GDP in 1960, by 2005, together with Taiwan, they accounted for more than 20 per cent of the world's GDP. Along with the ASEAN member states, their GDP matches that of the EU or the US. As for foreign-exchange reserves, Japan with 19 per cent, China with 11 per cent, Taiwan with 6.8 per cent, South Korea with 5.1 per cent and Hong Kong with 4.8 per cent of the global total are the five largest holders of foreign-exchange reserves in the world. In the end, this alone will not overcome the inherent competitive, if not confrontational character of the geopolitical constellation of the region. Economic cooperation is no panacea to resolve political contradictions and to overcome mistrust if it cannot be

transcended into a meaningful political and socio-cultural concept. It will finally be on the countries of Northeast Asia to decide under which type of order they want to live. Neither a shared identity nor shared consciousness as far as common merits of supranational order-building can be found in Northeast Asia yet. A sense of belonging to the region, however, is growing. For the time being, Northeast Asia can be characterized by “regionalization without regionalism”.²

II.

Usually, the geopolitical panorama of Northeast Asia is defined by evident political facts: the prevailing partition of the Korean peninsula; the danger of a North Korean atomic bomb; geopolitical tension between Japan and China over the primacy in Asia; conflicts over islands in the region that are symbolic for larger geopolitical rivalries (between China and Taiwan, between China and Vietnam, between Korea and Japan, between Japan and Russia): the future role of the United States as an Asian power and the US-China relation; the prospects for Russian-Chinese relations, particularly regarding the exploitation of Siberian natural resources. Europe is by and large absent from these debates and yet the European integration experience is regularly invoked as a model that might be emulated in order to overcome the geopolitical impasses Northeast Asia is facing.

Three fundamental obstacles to achieve regional integration can be identified in Northeast Asia beyond the usual short-term reflection on the matter. When the lens of studying Northeast Asia is elongated to take into account the historical legacy of the region, these three structural obstacles to regional integration in Northeast Asia become evident:

The ambivalence between self-induced action and external dependencies, including the relationship of Northeast Asian nations with Western powers

2 Samuel S. Kim, “Northeast Asia in the Local-Regional-Global Nexus”. *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield, 2004: 13.

and the attitude of Northeast Asian nations vis-à-vis key notions of state philosophy that emanated from the West;

The ongoing importance of categories of big power politics and balance of power strategies, including a traditional view on the relationship between war, national ambition and politics;

The prevalence of structures and a mentality shaped by World War II and its aftermath, including continuous contradictions between regimes and governance methods and an obsession with territorial disputes and alliance loyalties based on zero-sum assumptions.

Northeast Asia encountered the modern Western world in the 19th century as an intruding force. Missionaries, gun-boats, merchants with dubious practices – the first modern encounters of China, Japan, and Korea with Western powers were not at all amicable.³ Russia's advancement into Siberia added to the perception of an expansionist, if not aggressive outside world. All too often, the external forces were experienced as curse and not as asset. Northeast Asian nationalism is deeply rooted in anti-Western traditions. As modernization nationalism it was always focused on ways to meet the pressure from the West by improving and strengthening Northeast Asian cultures, people and countries. No matter the internal quarrels among the people and countries of the region, the overall skepticism against all external powers has been and still is a constantly present historical factor in the self-perception and development of Northeast Asia. The undisputed cultural centrality which China claimed for its position in the world ("Middle Kingdom") was not really challenged by Japanese and Korean self-perceptions, notwithstanding their own ambivalent, if not hostile attitude towards the Chinese during much of their mutual history. Interactions and struggles in the region were considered a matter of internal civilizational "family quarrel" while the encounters with the Western powers, Russia including, were of an altogether different nature. In contrasting them, since the second half of the 19th century Northeast Asians countries felt their

3 See David B. Abernethy, *The Dynamics of Global Dominance: European Overseas Empires, 1415-1980*, New Haven: Yale University Press, 2000.

technological weakness while at the same time they were reassessing their cultural authenticity.

European encounters with Northeast Asia during the 19th century were not all too different from the first presence of Americans and Russians in the region. The battle ships of US-Commodore Matthew Perry arrived in 1853 at Edo Bay, forcing the Japanese Emperor to open trade with the US after more than two centuries of seclusion. The Japanese shogun accepted the trade concessions US-President Filmore had asked for: Shimoda and Hakodate were opened for US commerce.⁴ Less known abroad but having left no small imprint on the national psyche was the foreign effort to seek trade and to protect the growing catholic community in Korea during the second half of the 19th century.⁵ After nine French priests had been killed and anti-Catholic persecutions were still under way in Korea, the American merchant ship “General Sherman” sailed up the Taedong River to Pyongyang, which he confused with Seoul at the Han River. The ship was burned and its crew killed in August 1866. In September 1866, the French Asiatic Squadron with seven warships entered Korean waters and prepared to attack Seoul. They failed to do so because of Korean defense. In 1871, US-Commander John Rodgers invaded Korea with five warships, attacking the fortifications on Kanghwa Ialand and returning to China only after fierce battles with the Koreans. In 1882, the US arranged peacefully for the opening of Korea through a Treaty of Armistice and Commerce signed at Chemulp’o, today’s Incheon. The Hermit Kingdom was beginning to open to the West, followed by similar treaties with England and Russia in 1883 and France in 1886. Russian ways to enter Northeast Asia were no less radical and belligerent as those of the “Western” powers. From the time Russians had entered Siberia and reached the Amur River and the Pacific Ocean in the 17th century, they had tried to get access to Japan and Korea. After China had ceded the region around Vladivostok to Russia as part of the

4 See Edwin O. Reischauer, *Japan. The Story of a Nation*, Tokyo: Tuttle, 1982 (3rd ed.): 107-136; Albert M. Craig: *Japan: Tradition and Transformation*, Tokyo: Tuttle, 1981 (3rd ed.): 116-144.

5 See Andrew C. Nahm, *Introduction to Korean History and Culture*, Elizabeth, NJ/Seoul: Hollym, 2004 (9th ed.):141-175.

overall external humiliation of China through unequal treaties, Russia began to project its interest into Korea and, through the construction of the Trans-Siberian Railway, into Manchuria, clashing with the Japanese up until Russia lost an outright war against Japan in 1905.⁶

As for China's enforced opening to the West, the unequal treaties are legacy: The Treaty of Nanking (1842) ended the First Opium War, forced China to cede Hong Kong to the British Empire and opened Canton, Amoy, Foochow, Ningpo and Shanghai as treaty ports for Western ships. The Treaty of Aigun (1858) was signed by Imperial Russia and the Qing Empire, establishing their border at the Amur River and thus the modern borders of Russia in the Far East. The Treaty of Tientsin (1858) between the Qing Empire, France, Russia and the United States opened eleven more Chinese ports to foreigners, permitting foreign legations in Beijing, allowing Christian missionary activities and legalizing the import of opium. The Treaty of Shimonoseki (1895) between China and Japan ended the Chinese-Japanese War and with it Chinese suzerainty over Korea while it brought the cession of Taiwan to Japan. The Convention of Beijing (1860) between the British Empire and the Qing Empire forced China to cede the Kowloon Peninsula and Hong Kong "in perpetuity" to the British Empire and parts of Outer Manchuria to Russia. The Treaty of 1901 between China on the one hand, the US, the United Kingdom, Japan, Russia, France, the German Empire, Italy, the Austro-Hungarian Empire, Belgium, Spain and the Netherlands on the other hand was signed after China's defeat in the Boxer Rebellion by the Eight Power Expeditionary Force. The Twenty-One Demands (1915), finally, secured temporary Japanese hegemony over China under the pretext of Japan's Declaration of War against the German Empire in 1914.⁷

A belligerent pursuit of interests, the inclination to dominate and a certain Western attitude of humiliation left no positive image of the outside world among many people in 19th century Northeast Asia. Of course, Northeast

6 See John J. Stephan, *The Russian Far East: A History*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1994.

7 See John King Fairbank, *Trade and Diplomacy on the China Coast: The Opening of Treaty Ports 1842-1854*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1969.

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Asian relations with Europeans and with Americans in the 19th century also included elements of mutual respect and cooperation. But all in all, the West was perceived as inclined to dominate while one's own society was recognized as weak and still lacking modernization. The Meiji Restoration in Japan (1867/1868) and the dethronement of the Chinese Emperor (1911) were unrelated symptoms of the same commonly shared desire to pursue an aggressive policy of self-induced modernization in order to protect one's own tradition and society from falling under Western dominance. While the West began to colonize the world, Northeast Asian nations started a period of self-colonization and self-improvement that subsequently triggered aggressive modernization nationalism and bilateral struggles for dominance in the region. The latter one was most notable in the relationship between China and Japan, which became an imperial power itself, in that regard closer to Western powers than to the behavior of its Northeast Asian neighbors: Taiwan became a Japanese colony in 1895, Korea in 1910. In contrast, Russia's role in Northeast Asia was not only one of an external threat. For instance, Korea was seeking Russian assistance against the increasing Japanese intrusion after the Japanese defeat of China in 1895. The same, of course, became true for the US protection of Japan and South Korea after World War II and throughout the Cold War: America, formerly an imperial power in Northeast Asia, became the embodiment of liberty.

Cultural pride and self-protection went hand in hand with the emergence of a distinct Northeast Asian modernization nationalism. Western technological devices as well as Western concepts of modern statehood were adopted whenever they helped to strengthen and protect the peoples of Northeast Asia from being dominated by Western powers. This became a genuine feature of the relationship between Northeast Asia and the West, unlike the relationship between Western powers and other regions of the world. This structure of encounter and the reaction to it did, however, not include the recognition of any of the external powers as a well-respected and widely recognized "Asian power". To this day, neither Russia nor the United States or Europe and any of its leading countries are recognized as "natural Asian powers" in Northeast Asia. As for Russia, efforts to develop a triangular regional project with Chinese, North Korean and Russian participa-

tion indicate the potential.⁸ But in contrast to these plans, the factual depopulation of Russia's Far East has become noticeable since the end of the Soviet Union: Some scholars have assumed a drop of Russians in the Far East down to 7.2 million and warned that over 100 million Chinese in Northeastern China might seek "relief from overcrowding".⁹ Like the US, Russia maintains strategic interests and advanced positions in Northeast Asia to this day. Fully respected Asian powers they have not become however. It is indicative that the promotion of a cultural sphere of communication in Northeast Asia by the Korean President in 2004 did not make reference to Russia, after all an immediate neighbor of Korea, let alone the US, continuously the provider of security and stability in South Korea and for Japan with more than 100.000 soldiers deployed in Northeast Asia. The sense of gratitude towards the Americans is disappearing even in places where since the outbreak of the Cold War freedom was absolutely dependent of their protection, such as in South Korea. While the American role in supporting or even providing liberty in Northeast Asia is not forgotten, it is also recalled that the US participated in gun-boat politics and enforced policies of open doors in the second half of the 19th century across the region, at the time not being different from European imperial practices in Northeast Asia. Disputes over the US-led "War on Terrorism" have reinforced a sense of silent drifting apart between the US and new generations during the early years of the 21st century, even in the traditionally most loyal countries of the region (Japan, South Korea).

Northeast Asia begins to reflect about cultural commonality, but it does so with the explicit exclusion of those external powers that have become key actors in the geopolitics of Northeast Asia for most of the last two centuries.¹⁰ Although in reality the US has been an Asian power at least since

8 See the "Tumen River Area Development Programme." <www.tumenprogramme.org>

9 Gilbert Rozman, "Russian Foreign Policy in Northeast Asia". *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S.Kim, op.cit.: 215.

10 An international conference in 2004 under the auspices of the Korean President's project for the formation of a Northeast Asian Cultural Community for Peace and Prosperity brought together representatives from China, Japan and Korea, but no thought was spend on the Northeast Asian role of either the US or of Russia: Korea

World War II, it is facing various efforts of selective exclusion from the formation of regional Northeast Asian arrangements, notably from a possible ASEAN enlargement. The tendency to limit US strategic influence in Northeast Asia coincides with an interesting reversion of the cultural and geopolitical reassessment of China and its global role: No longer considering itself the “Middle Kingdom”, China has begun to impressively awaken after a long century of internal turmoil in full recognition of its role as an Asian, that is to say a Northeast Asian country. Chinese universalism seems to transcend into a new Chinese sense of regionalism. As a consequence of continuously high growth rates of its economy since the beginning of reforms under Deng Xiaoping in 1978, China has risen from thirteenth place among world trading nations to rank five (if the EU is counted as a single bloc to rank four after the US, Canada, the EU and Japan). China accounts for around one fifth of the growth in world trade during the early years of the 21st century. While 75 per cent of all investment in China is of foreign origin, in 2002 China surpassed the US as the world’s leading destination for foreign direct investment, “absorbing nearly \$53 billion”.¹¹ By 2010, China is projected to receive \$100 billion foreign direct investment. Politically, it is obvious that China has opted for a “selective support of regional initiatives”¹² and as far as international and multinational fora are concerned, China has “moved from virtual isolation from international organizations to membership numbers approaching about 80 percent of those of the major industrialized states, and around 160 percent of the world average”.¹³ China’s genuine revisionism since the early 1980s has not been revolutionary, but inclusionist and thus stabilizing global order-building. It

Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (ed.), *The Policy Study Session for the Formation of the Northeast Asian Cultural Community for Peace and Prosperity. Proceedings of the International Conference*, Seoul: Korean Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences, 2004.

11 Thomas G. Moore, “China’s International Relations: The Economic Dimension.” *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, op.cit.: 106

12 Ibid.:129.

13 Alastair Iain Johnston, “China’s International Relations: The Political and Security Dimension”. *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S.Kim, op.cit.: 67.

is indicative for things to come that China is doing so as an Asian country and no longer under the claim of autarkic Chinese universalism.

Some pre-modern concepts of politics prevail in Northeast Asia as part of its legacy of encountering external powers as force of subjugation: the primacy of national sovereignty aspiration; the syndrome of balance of power equations; in the Chinese (as in the American!) case the continuous relevance of war as a category of conflict-resolution, and in the case of South Korea the realistic fear of a continuation of exactly such a pattern of behavior on the side of North Korea; a zero-sum mentality as far as status, influence and power of any of the regional or external actors is involved; as its consequence the assumption that regional cooperation must not curtail autonomous freedom to act and that regional integration might undermine the latter while distinctively devalue national sovereignty as the prime source of national political autonomy and pride. External actors are inevitable partners in the pursuit of the globalization-related goals of the countries of Northeast Asia (modernization and mastering globalization in order to strengthen the nation and its role in the region and the world) while they remain suspicious as far as the scope of national action and autonomy of the region as a whole are concerned. Among themselves, however, the Northeast Asian nations tend to pursue policies of competition in the economic sphere with astuteness and focus as if traditional national rivalries have been transferred from the sphere of politics to that of the economy. Largely competitive economic structures and ambitions make one wonder whether or not cooperative, let alone integrative political approaches could ever be accommodated in such an environment.

The logic of big power politics prevails in Northeast Asia. Big power politics is based on the autonomous pursuit of power as prime category of inter-state relations and is intended to maximize one's own power at the expense of the other countries in the region. The attitude of big power politics can also be exercised by small countries as it is defined by the prevalence of a zero-sum-mentality: My neighbors gain is my own inevitable loss. Strategies of balance of power are defined as efforts to gain an equilibrium of power equations or a freeze of power struggles in a specific region. Under conditions of the attitude of big power politics, strategies of balance of

power are the best possible approach to tame this attitude of big power politics. But strategies of balance of power cannot reverse the logic of weakness, unraveling and destruction that is inherent in balance of power relations. Northeast Asia's countries have adopted the logic of big power politics from Western models, long outdated by now in the West. In Northeast Asia, however, big power politics and strategies of balance of power have been internalized as the only guarantee to national sovereignty and a respectable regional and international status. Big power politics has become a reflex in Northeast Asia's struggle for independence and national sovereignty. It has been reinforced and overlapped by the experience with the Cold War antagonisms pertinent to Northeast Asia: The antagonism between the United States and the Soviet Union, the antagonism between the United States and the People's Republic of China, and the antagonism between the People's Republic of China and the Soviet Union have all left their mark on the mindset and mentality of policy actors and public opinion in Northeast Asia. Most of the region's indigenous conflicts of the second half of the 20th century have been a function of the Cold War paradigm.

Northeast Asia's geopolitical constellation has evolved from a conundrum of colonial and decolonizing (that is to say nationalistic) elements, ideological rivalries and Cold War parameters, and finally from internal power ambitions and struggles for hegemony. Northeast Asia's big power mentality coincides with a traditional notion of warfare as a means of politics. Neither China nor the USA has abandoned the idea that war can serve a function to resolve conflicts. Divided Korea continues to live in the shadow of war and the presence of US soldiers across the country is indicative for the fact that in the end of the analysis, World War II will not end as long as the Korean armistice is executed in Pammunjon with an almost archaic precision. The Cairo Declaration of December 1, 1943, stating that "in due course Korea shall become free and independent" is still unfulfilled promise to half of the Korean peninsula.¹⁴ The Korean War (1950-1953) can be

14 Cited in Andrew C.Nahm, Introduction to Korean History and Culture, op.cit.: 213: See this book also for an account of the path that lead from Japanese colonial rule to Soviet occupation and subsequent partition under an American plan to limit Soviet influence on the Korean peninsula:213-256.

considered a prolongation of World War II in Northeast Asia, not being overcome in its geopolitical consequences to this day. North Korea keeps on playing with the effects of the threat of warfare looming over a region that it might be able to (relatively) hold hostage with nuclear arms. Japan, in turn, has revoked warfare, but has not properly recognized its own role as perpetrator in bringing about much of today's geopolitical constellation of Northeast Asia (including the rise of Communism in China and both communism and nationalism in Korea with the subsequent division of the Korean peninsula). Instead, Japan prefers to be perceived as victim of World War II (atomic bombs over Hiroshima and Nagasaki) and strives for renewed global recognition in the shadow of the US-China rivalry: A Japanese culture of shame meets its neighbor's expectation of responsibility towards past victims. This pattern could limit Japan's ambition to join the UN Security Council as China – already a permanent member of the Security Council with veto power – does not intend to revoke or curtail its own plan to become also the leading Northeast Asian economic power. Thus, China uses means of controlled provocation against Japan in order to define the limits of Japan's scope of action on the global stage. All of this stems from the logic of big power politics and is not conducive for a climate of reality-transforming integration.

What holds true for the geopolitical constellation of Northeast Asia is only reinforced by the region's geo-economic development: The highly dynamic economies of Northeast Asia are by and large structured along the limiting principle of competition and hardly along the mutually advantageous principle of complementarity. While this guarantees national focus in each country and impressive success in global markets, it does not automatically support interconnectedness and the ability to share one's potential for the sake of higher means of cooperative gains. Although indications might point to inherent trends of business-to-business cooperation across national boundaries and loyalties, Northeast Asia still has to prove the advantage of comprehensive patterns of complementarity in the name of regionalism, with both an economic and a political implication.

3. The experience of World War II and the Cold War has not reduced, but rather reinforced the sensitivity for national sovereignty in Northeast Asia.

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War and Cold War experiences overlapped with the genuine struggle for national independence against Japanese colonial domination. Although the remaking of order in Northeast Asia includes Japan beyond the empire's dark legacy of promoting a Greater East Asia Co-Prosperty Sphere under its control, suspicion against Japanese claims to hegemony have not vanished. Even stronger than this suspicion is the fervor across the region to defend national sovereignty based on the status quo established after 1945. This has almost turned out into an obsession as far as the pending territorial disputes in the region are concerned. It can hardly be understood elsewhere in the world why a chain of seemingly irrelevant islands – from Sakhalin to Dokto, from Taiwan to the Spratley Islands – remain at the center of territorial disputes across the region. In Northeast Asia, the island issues do play the same role as contested border-regions did during most of Europe's 19th and 20th century history: these islands are not considered mutual bridges between neighboring countries, but rather barriers and trophy's in each countries claim to regional power status.

Bitter disputes in interpreting history and historical justice are resurging in Northeast Asia with almost predictable repetition. They indicate ongoing mistrust that is not only rooted in today's claims of status and power. This mistrust is rooted in historical differences, disputes and contradictions that have been constitutive for the emergence of modern Northeast Asia. Most notable among a set of legacies of mistrust is the one stemming from regime antagonism prevailing in Northeast Asia to this day. Japan is considered by its critics as the disguised prolongation of imperial attitudes that did not vanish from the Japanese political culture with the US-imposed democratic development after 1945. Yet, nobody can deny the strength of modern Japan, accounting for 67 percent of Northeast Asia's GDP.¹⁵ South Korea considers itself the authentic moral leader in pursuit of democratic values having struggled for them against external colonial imposition and internal military rule. By now, it has also become the tenth biggest economy in the world.

15 Thomas Berger, "Japan's International Relations: The Political and Security Dimensions." *The International Relations of northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, op.cit.: 135.

The People's Republic of China, after all, prevails as a communist country with a one-party system and human right abuses, no matter its impressive economic modernization. North Korea, under China's protective umbrella and neutralizing control, is the modern version of a hermit kingdom, and in fact has evolved as the most secluded totalitarian state with a high degree of Orwellian characteristics and horrifying features of brain-washing. Its GDP in 2000 amounted to \$17 billion, "a tiny fraction of South Korea's \$455 billion".¹⁶ Taiwan considers itself the "right China" because of its democratic record. Yet, Taiwan is increasingly drawn back towards mainland China because of its magnetic modernization attraction: Taiwanese capital ranks second as source of foreign direct investment in the People's Republic of China. By now, one million Taiwanese are living in mainland China, 300,000 in Shanghai alone, and more than half of Taiwan's top hundred companies have investments in the People's Republic. Communist ideology and fear of violent Chinese annexation seem to increasingly be overtaken by a sense of national unity, recalling a long cultural and a rather shorter political tradition of unity (only from 1683 until 1895, Taiwan was under Chinese rule, being a prefecture of Fujian).

Russia, finally, has been so much absorbed by its internal political and socio-economic turmoil since the demise of the Soviet Union that it hardly has been able to project any promising image, let alone a role-model for emulation to any of the Northeast Asian countries. The proclamation of a Sino-Russian Treaty of Friendship in 2001, "representing to all appearances the best relationship between these two territorially imposing neighbors in nearly fifty years"¹⁷, cannot reverse the decline of Russia's Far East although China has become the biggest customer of Russian weaponry, largely produced in the country's Far East. The People's Republic of China began to purchase Russian weaponry in 1990 after the US and the EU imposed an arms sale boycott against China, following the Tiananmen Square massacre. For the period 2000 to 2005, the Chinese arms sale from

16 C.S.Eliot Kang," North Korea's International Relations: The Successful Failure?" The International Relations of Northeast Asia, ed. Samuel S. Kim, op.cit.:287.

17 Lowell Dittmer, "The Emerging Northeast Asian Regional Order." The International Relations of Northeast Asia, ed. Samuel S. Kim, op.cit.: 336.

Russia alone was expected to be worth \$5-6 billion.¹⁸ Yet, Russia's overall decline and crisis of political culture has not enabled the country to maintain its power projection in Northeast Asia. In fact, it has even brought Mongolia closer to Northeast Asia, considering itself a successful model of post-communist democratic transformation while redirecting its cultural focus towards China and curtailing its ties with Russia.

Such is the panorama of Northeast Asia as a region of excessive contradiction as far as regimes, governance and political culture is concerned. Under the impression of Northeast Asia's role for economic globalization, the regime component and the impact of political culture seems often to be underrated in the analysis of the region. But how can one expect shared destiny under the umbrella of a scheme of pooled sovereignty as long as the political systems and their underlying political culture are so fundamentally different? During the decades of Europe's division, it would not have served any purpose to only invoke common cultural traditions while denying the divisive character of antagonistic regimes. As much as culture was connecting Poland and Portugal, Hungary and Ireland, Sweden and Slovakia, it would have been inconceivable for the European Community to recognize any Central and Eastern European communist state as its member in the absence of democracy, rule of law and market economy. As integration is not only about markets, but primarily about shared legal norms and democratic values, nobody with the faintest idea about the differences in political regimes, constitutional and governance structures and in the underlying political cultures of Northeast Asia's countries should be astonished about the absence of integration mechanisms in this region. In the end, the absence of regional integration in Northeast Asia is a matter of normative and systemic differences and not a function of the Asian financial crisis of 1997 or any other economic fact.

18 Ibid.:339.

III.

It is stimulating to reflect about the potential for cultural commonality in Northeast Asia capable of transcending historical legacies and fears, geopolitical antagonisms and scars and prevailing political contradictions and struggles for economic leadership. The Confucian tradition among the people of “chopstick cultures” should not be underestimated across the region. It stimulates discipline and work ethic, mercantilism and deep sympathy for material progress, service orientation and focus on education, long-term perspective and respectful loyalties. Amidst modern Northeast Asian countries, traditions are revitalized while the dynamics of globalization might blur such trends as merely folkloric. Northeast Asia is reconsidering the value of tradition, heritage and authenticity amidst booming mega-cities and ever speedier technological achievements: South Korean President Roh Moo-Hyun has even launched a presidential initiative with this specific mandate. Yet it is unclear if and how - and by whom - cultural traditions or trends could be translated into political strategies for region-building. A comparative perspective of the European experience provides only limited inspiration in this effort: Most analysts in Northeast Asia would consider such comparison as an overly constructivist approach, which contrasts with their deeply rooted pragmatism (and pride). Yet, it is worth reflecting about some comparable matters.

Among the many legends about European integration one can find the following story: When Jean Monnet, one of the important founding fathers of European integration, was reflecting about the path towards integration, he is said to have argued that if he would do it all over again he would start with culture. No evidence in his statements can be found for this quotation.¹⁹ Often reference to the alleged sentence of Monnet is used to criticize European integration for not having achieved a sufficient degree of popular legitimacy. It is questionable whether or not European integration is lacking legitimacy and it is even more questionable whether or not Europe

19 See Jean Monnet, *Mémoires*, Paris: Fayard, 1976; François Duchêne, *Jean Monnet: The First Statesman of Interdependence*, New York/London: W.W.Norton & Co., 1994.

would have been able to achieve a higher degree of legitimacy if the integration process would have started with culture. It is doubtful whether this could have happened in the 1950s. The main reason: Culture is so important to Europeans. Aside of being important, one could conclude a cultural history of the people of Europe by way of saying that what they all have in common is the fact that they are different from each other. Shortly after the horrendous World War II, in which 18.500 Europeans were killed on average per day by other Europeans, mistrust and cultural suspicion were as prevailing in Europe as the hope to overcome the deadly vicious circle of antagonistic and clashing nationalism, the inclination of cultural sentiments of superiority and, may be even more so, prejudicial cultural perceptions of one another.²⁰ Therefore, it turned out to be right and far-sighted to begin European integration with the Community of Coal and Steel, and subsequently with the development of a Common Market. It was the right thing because at the end, it also transformed cultural relations in Europe.²¹ But it did transform cultural relations in Europe only because the integration process was thoroughly based – from day one – in the creation of a supra-national community. It was based on the concept of a steady transfer of national sovereignty to the European level, based on the concept of a supra-national community of law that was increasingly growing into a parliamentary democracy.

Europe's struggle for the first ever European Constitution communication testifies to the growth of a community of cultural communication, based on mutual recognition of cultural diversity and based on the understanding that European integration is a process toward a common political identity without undermining the cultural diversity of its people. In fact, European integration preserves the cultural diversity among its constituent parts through its common political identity. The process has not been completed and it

20 See William I. Hitchcock, *The Struggle for Europe: The Turbulent History of a Divided Continent, 1945 to the Present*, New York: Anchor Books, 2004.

21 See Derek W. Urwin, *The Community of Europe: A History of European Integration since 1945*, London/New York: Longman, 1995; Martin Dedman, *The Origins and Development of the European Union 1945 -1995*, London: Routledge, 1996; Desmond Dinan, *Europe Recast: A history of European Union*, Boulder: Lynn Rieffer, 2004.

remains full of flaws and contradictions. But in spite of all the idiosyncrasies of European governance and European policy-formulation, the European Union is nowadays considered the political expression of Europe. It provides the frame for the further and stable evolution of cultural communication. It must be questioned whether Europe would have been capable to achieve this the other way around, that is to say by starting with culture, when the notion of cultural primacy or culture-based prejudice was still so prevailing across Europe.

Cultural communication under the umbrella of political integration has found different expressions, not all of them logically consistent. Yet they work.²² Take the institutions of the European Union. 20 official languages are recognized in the EU, interpreters of all of them find jobs in the European Parliament and in the European Commission. Every directly elected member of the European Parliament can contribute to the deliberations in this parliament in his or her mother tongue. This will always remain so because it is the recognition of linguistic cultural diversity in Europe that produces legitimacy. Europe is only stable if an Estonian feels as much at home as a British or a Portuguese or a Maltese. This feeling is by and large deeply enshrined in the ability to speak one's mother tongue in common institutions. On the other hand, the working languages in the European Commission, the European Council and the European Court of Justice are for practical purposes limited to English, French and German, the three languages spoken by most members of the European political elite. One might contemplate whether this list could or should be enlarged to include Spanish and Polish. It is doubtful whether this would be of much help as far as the function of working procedures in the mentioned European institutions is concerned. Decisions of the European Council, and more so of the ever more important European Court of Justice might be pronounced in two or three languages only and yet Europe will remain confronted with 20 different interpretations because an argument, a phrase, even a word can have 20 different meanings in the legal or political context of all member states. A community of cultural communication recognizes this fact and starts to

22 See David Dunkerley, et.al., eds., *Changing Europe: Identities, Nations, and Citizens*, London/New York: Routledge, 2002.

interpret the prevailing differences on the basis of a community spirit that supports commonality and not dissociation. That is the European experience, no matter how insufficient it remains to be.

The result of a comparative study on the prevailing differences of mentalities in Northwestern Europe that is to say in the region of Belgium, Luxembourg, the Netherlands and Germany's North-Rhine-Westphalia is telling: This is one of the most powerful economic areas of the European Union. It is also its most densely populated industrial zone and it is considered to be one of the cultural centers of the European Union. Yet, cultural differences remain startling and business people who tend to think that their counterpart across the no longer existing border behaves in the same way he or she does will often be mistaken.²³ While in French-influenced regions, you do informal business negotiations over an extensive lunch with good wine, the Anglo-Saxon habit would rather be to grab a sandwich and then sit down formally to talk business in a serene atmosphere with bottled water. Differences also exist – to give another example - as far as invitations among business partners into private homes are concerned. Even if you are invited to the home of a business partner, do you bring flowers for the lady of the house or not? And when do you leave again after a nice evening? The answers collected in a “mentality guide” for Northwestern Europe demonstrate one fundamental insight into the evolution of Europe as a Union of cultural communication: Differences prevail even among the closest of neighbors and in fact even within single countries.²⁴ Managers of companies with, let's say, joint French and German ownership have to organize retreats to deal with problems of cultural communication among themselves. This relates to mentality differences impacting business behavior and to contrasting expectations and perceptions of business procedures of their partner. But all these differences have largely become differences

23 Jacobus Delwaide, et.al., eds., *Die Rheingesellschaft: Mentalitäten, Kulturen und Traditionen im Herzen Europas*, Baden-Baden: Nomos, 2003.

24 Ute Schuerings, *Zwischen Pommes und Praline: Mentalitätsunterschiede, Unternehmens- und Verhandlungskultur in den Niederlanden, Belgien, Luxemburg und Nordrhein-Westfalen*, Münster: Arena, 2003.

in mentality. They are no longer differences in identity, quickly escalating into disputes over principles, pride and prejudice.

This is also one of the startling discrepancies that exist to this day between integrated Europe and the remaining regions of Europe: While in Luxembourg or Amsterdam, the matter might be one of different mentalities over business habits, in Kosovo the matter has escalated into life and death. Identity is prevailing wherever you travel South Eastern Europe. By and large it does still exist in most of the other post-communist societies that joined the European Union on June 1, 2004. Wherever you ask people in Central and South Eastern Europe about themselves and their ethnic, linguistic or religious neighbors, they will tell you “We are different”, meaning “We are special”. After five decades of integration, in those societies of the European Union that have gone through the long and still unfinished process of political transformation – and most importantly that is to say the process of transforming their political culture – the answer you will get most likely will be “We live different” or “we do business in different ways” or “We eat different food”. Men are what they eat – that might be an anthropological fact. But men do not need to antagonize each other and to built walls around their diverse habits and attitudes, norms and traditions, that is a European experience.

What has the European Union actively done to promote cultural communication? First of all, it can do only little, according to the Treaty provisions constituting the European Union as a union of law. The most remarkable trend has been one of indirect appreciation for culture and its related sphere, namely education. In the past, even the idea that the European Union might touch upon matters of education was considered a taboo. Most EU member states see autonomy over education structures and content as one of the holy ingredients of their national rights. When the European Union seriously prepared its strategy for globalization at the 2000 Lisbon European Council meeting of heads of state and government it also discovered the importance of education. Improving the structures and the quality of education was recognized as a priority in order to adapt European society and economy to the challenges and opportunities of globalization. This might be a highly functional perspective on education as our children de-

serve the best education for their own sake. But at least it increased the European Union's awareness for education.

As part of the strategy for globalization, the EU introduced a new mechanism of pursuing its goals: "Open coordination". This mechanism is intended to prevent resistance from the side of individual member states of the EU to comply with EU goals as it is a much softer way of governing than the rigid form of strictly imposed EU regulations. Based on the notion of "open coordination", the European Commission has developed standards for bench-marking in the field of education. In fact, the relevant "Directorate General" of the European Commission – sort of a EU Ministry for Education and Culture – has become the center of interest and attention ever since. Comparing the quality of education standards across the European Union has only begun. But it will foster education reforms and make the EU's education structures step by step more competitive in the age of globalization. It also strengthens the concept of the Union as one of cultural communication.

While preparing the European Constitution in 2002/2003, the Constitutional Convention and many media in Europe discussed the meaning of religion for the political future of Europe. This was one of the most serious debates on the topic of identity in Europe for many years, free of cynicism and with the intention to understand the importance of religion in the life of many Europeans, no matter how strong the overall degree of secularization in Europe might be. In the end, the Constitution did not include a convincing and integrative appreciation of the diversity of religious creeds and expressions of faith in today's Europe. This remains however an important topic, not just for the question of religious faith as such, but most importantly for the question: How do religious traditions and convictions impact our understanding of critical moral issues in today's world? This is a matter of universal importance: Think of issues like stem-cell research or related questions of the moral impact of technical progress in medicine that effects our definition of the beginning and the end of human life.²⁵

25 See also Joseph H.H. Weiler, *Ein christliches Europa*, Salzburg: Pustet, 2004.

Europe today is confronted with the fact that not only does Islam constitute the second largest religious community in the European Union. The question of possible Turkish membership in the European Union will increase the importance of building cultural communication across religious borders, no matter how the accession issue will finally be resolved. For the time being, Muslims constitute around 3.5 per cent of the overall EU population of 455 million. With Turkey as an EU member, the percentage of Muslims inside the EU would increase to 15 per cent. Would such a percentage for a religious minority really damage or destroy the leading pattern of Christian identity that has shaped most of Europe's traditions? Defensive Christianity is probably more its own problem than the religious creed of other Europeans. Libertarian secularism will not be a convincing answer either. It rather seems as if Europe has to learn to live with more religious diversity and at the same time has to develop an inclusive notion as far as the value of a public role of religion is concerned, accommodating all religions present in the EU.²⁶ May be less spectacular than the relationship with Islam, but no less important is the fact that with enlargement of the European Union to South Eastern Europe the continent is beginning to rediscover the split between Latin and Orthodox Christianity with its implication for social and economic ethics, just to mention one example. As with Islam, this is not just a theological matter, but a question relating to the evolution of European political culture. Time and again Europe has to rediscover and incorporate new elements of diversity that will transfigure the unity Europe is striving to achieve under the roof of the European Union. The challenge is to maintain an inclusive concept of cultural communication yet not to resort to a relativistic concept of human dignity and the interpretation of human rights.

So far, most successful activities to build cultural communities in Europe were rather issue-related and functional, no matter whether or not they were policy-induced or originated from civil society initiatives. It is worth mentioning the EURO NEWS TV channel, accessible in all EU member

26 See Nezar Al Sayyad/Martin Castells, eds., *Muslim Europe or Euro-Islam: Politics, Culture, and Citizenship in the Age of Globalization*, Lanham: Lexington Books, 2002.

states in the respective national language. This TV program gives you a rather EU oriented overview of the most important political, economic and cultural events – and of course sports, which has always been much ahead as a means to strengthen cultural communication in Europe. It is also worth mentioning the bilateral television channel “ARTE”, a commercial television station broadcasting the same program simultaneously in German and French.²⁷ In spite of these promising examples, the media remain the weakest link in the chain to establish a European public sphere: All print media and practically all electronic in the EU remain oriented towards a specific national political system. They have begun to cover EU developments only recently with more professionalism.²⁸

The traditional sequence of activities favorable for the promotion of cultural communication has obviously been practiced in Europe: promoting language studies and student exchanges, twinning cities and declaring an interesting city the “Cultural Capital of Europe”, each year on a rotating system, which is much linked to cultural tourism and has turned out to be a source of strengthening “European-ness” across the EU.

One important aspect cannot be missing from a comparative assessment of the situations in Northeast Asia and in the EU: The effort to establish a European history textbook. Historians and other intellectuals from across the EU have developed interesting, even impressive examples of textbooks, which try to narrate the complex history of Europe as a permanent interplay of national histories.²⁹ Without understanding that commonality in the European civilization is the binding glue, they argue, one could never understand the diversity, and the antagonisms and conflicts in Europe. It is worth, for instance, to study different national expressions of architecture, but to learn about the only one European period of baroque architecture, to study different European expressions of art, but to learn about the only one

27 See Susan Emmanuel, “A Community of Culture?: The European Television Channel.” *History of European Ideas*, 21.2(1995):169-176.

28 See Robin B. Hodess, “The Role of News Media in European Integration: A Framework of Analysis for Political Science.” *Res Publica*, 39.2(1997): 215-227.

29 See Frédéric Delouche, ed., *Illustrated History of Europe: A Unique Portrait of Europe's Common History*, London: Cassell, 2001.

European period of impressionism, to study different European expressions of literature, but to learn about the only one European period of existentialism or of romanticism.

Beyond writing textbooks as joint efforts to create a common European view of its own history, governments have also been involved in promoting the elimination of hatred and prejudice in textbooks that deal with the most contested aspects of European history. This, of course, has gone way beyond the European Union and originated in the efforts to tame and overcome the Cold War divide between East and West Europe. It began with a German-Polish and a German-Russian history textbook commission. A German institute, the Georg-Eckert-Institute, set up to coordinate this process as part of confidence building measures and the establishment of new human bonds among former enemies, has broadened its perspective and promoted its expertise among the different people of former Yugoslavia, where the divided memory of history is still all-pervasive and highly politicized.

Can any lessons be drawn from these and related European experiences for the noble search to built cultural communication in Northeast Asia? Some conclusions one might draw with all caution from the European experience in building cultural communities as part of long and unfinished processes to built a full-fledged European Union as the new expression of the European body politic:

Northeast Asia would be well advised not to start overambitious and underfunded. The very noble role of building cultural communication should probably begin with gradual processes and with a limited, realistic scope, manageable in terms of human resources and of financial resources. It can easily overburden partners if too much shall be achieved at the same time. It could also generate resilience if the starting point is too conceptual and principled as it can easily politicize and derail the process.

Northeast Asia would be well advised to recognize cultural communication as a pluralistic process. As there is no center of culture, there cannot be centralized cultural communication. It ought to flow in manifold ways, putting trust into the ambition, curiosity and creativity of the human mind.

Northeast Asia: Obstacles to Regional Integration

This might require a political and bureaucratic frame of support, but cultural communication can only flourish if it will be felt by the people, by civil society and its manifold expressions as useful, stimulating and valuable.

Northeast Asia would be well advised to start somewhat non-political, for instance with an essay competition among high-school students in all countries of the region on the question “Direction Northeast Asia: The meaning of cultural communication in our part of the world”.

Northeast Asia would be well advised to promote the inclusion of cultural matters in the wider context of a scheme for cooperation and security in Northeast Asia, which also addresses matters of security, economic cooperation, confidence-building measures, technological exchange and human contacts.

Northeast Asia would be well advised to go its own way instead of waiting until anybody else in the world will start what the main actors in the region have to consider their own duty. There is no cultural center in any region of the world that will nurture trust, generate sustainable support among as many citizens as possible and anticipate political evolutions to the benefit of all cultures and the dialogue among the people in the world. Cultural communication does not distinguish between center and periphery. Where there is culture, there is a center. Periphery is alien to culture although, as we have experienced, creativity often comes in from the fringes.

Three principle guidelines might unite the search for cultural communities both in Europe and in Northeast Asia.³⁰ First and foremost, it will be essential to develop what political philosopher John Stuart Mill has called “communities of recollection”. They will design the mental map which we apply to understand the current world and our duties in tomorrow’s world. If we reflect about mental maps, it might, for instance, be worth thinking which paintings or photos are most widely used in our school books to underline what history means to us. By now, in Europe – all across Western, Eastern, Northern and Southern Europe! - a certain telling consent exists

30 See James W.Booth, “Communities of Memory: On Identity, Memory, and Debt.” *The American Political Science Review*, 93.2(1999): 249-263.

regarding the most widely spread defining images of European self-interpretation. On top of the continent-wide list of paintings and photos used in school textbooks across of all Europe are: John Turnbulls “American Declaration of Independence” (1776), Jacques-Louis Davids “Oath at the Beginning of the French Revolution” (1789), Eugene Isabeys “Session of the Congress of Vienna”(1815), Eugene Delacroix’ “Massacre of Chios and Greece on the Ruins of Missolonghi”(1826), Anton Alexander von Werners “Proclamation of the German Empire in the Versailles Castle” (1871), William Orpens “Signing of the Versailles Peace Treaty” (1919), a photo of Lenin talking to Red Army soldiers (1920), Pablo Picassos “Bombardment of Guernica” (1937), a photo of the Yalta Conference (1945), a photo of the Soviet flag over the German parliament in Berlin(1945) and a photo of the fall of the Berlin Wall (1989). As a good number of paintings and photos from this list do not represent happy moments of European history, one has to conclude: It is not the content of these paintings and photos that matter, but how they are interpreted with hindsight knowledge in order to learn from past failures.³¹ One might wonder which paintings and pictures such a list would contain to reflect Northeast Asia’s self-portrayal.

As far as more political principles are concerned, it would be fair to include in the list of a European community of recollections: the rejection of imperialism and racism, the rejection of totalitarianism and nationalism, sensitivity toward hegemonic inclinations of any partner or neighbor, primacy of rule of law and respect for human rights, appreciation of freedom and solidarity, confidence in supranational integration among ourselves and multi-lateral processes with all other partners in the world. These principles are based in a Europe-wide “community of recollections” which is still weak in certain regions of South Eastern Europe and contested to this day in the Northern Caucasus. Yet, and this would be a second principle serving as lightning rod, it will remain without alternative to root the further development of cultural communication in the success of common experience. This is why it has become important to write the history of European inte-

31 See Susanne Popp, “Auf dem Weg zu einem europäischen ‘Geschichtsbild’: Anmerkungen zur Entstehung eines gesamteuropäischen Bilderkanons.” *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte*, 7.8(2004):23-32.

gration. This is why it is also indicative how much the knowledge of foreign languages has spread: In 1950, about ten per cent of Europeans were able to speak a foreign language. Today, about half of all Europeans speak foreign languages; in the young generation even two third speak another language. Most widely spread, of course, is English, but the European Union is propagating that every European should learn two foreign languages beside his or her mother tongue.

Finally, the third principle that is relevant for the constitution of a European public sphere and probably for any formation of cultural communication is the willingness to face the future as a common task. Neither battles or victories of the past, nor good or bad interpretations of history, neighbors and actions do help us in this regard. It is only the unwavering commitment to address the challenges that life brings to our doorsteps that will bring us forward and guarantee a good future for our children. In this task, Europe and Northeast Asia find common and comparable ground in search of the specific expression of each of our specific regional cultural communication and a public sphere.³²

IV.

Against this background, the perspective for immediate structures of regional integration in Northeast Asia comparable with the European ambition to pool sovereignty, law and governance does not look too bright yet. In the first place, Northeast Asian countries and actors have to clarify topical and methodological confusion. Not every reference to regionalism means region-building. Northeast Asia is blessed with a wide array of proposals for “free trade agreements” (FTA) and “preferential trade agreements” (PTA).³³ It sometimes seems as if the perspective of free trade agreements has become a mania, not hampered by the obvious absence of

32 See Hartmut Kaelble, “The Historical Rise of a European Public Sphere.” *Journal of European Integration*, 8.2(2002):9-22.

33 See Motoshige Itoh, “Economic Integration in East Asia: A Japanese Viewpoint.” *Regional Integration – Europe and Asia Compared*, eds. Woosik Moon/Bernadette Andreosso-O’Callaghan, Aldershot: Ashgate, 2005: 78-93.

political trust among many of the people and countries in the region. As there is nothing wrong with viable free trade agreements, in themselves they do not constitute a structure of regional integration. They might be considered a pre-integration scheme and certainly they comply with the logic and aspiration of the World Trade Organization (WTO). Region-building might begin with a free trade agreement and a free trade agreement does not preclude the development towards more comprehensive schemes of political and legal forms of integration. But there should be no doubt that free trade agreements per se are expressions of regional cooperation, not of regional integration.

As all Northeast Asian countries are inspired and driven by modernization nationalism – or at least by efforts to consolidate the achievements of their modernization nationalism – they are putting the main emphasis of their international positioning on the development of geo-economic considerations. It seems as if politics is of secondary importance in designing the future of Northeast Asia, although political disputes, at times of an archaic nature, are reverberating through the region. The lack of political leadership across Northeast Asian countries – and most notably in the democratic countries of the region – stands in stark contrast to the pro-active, at times even aggressive leadership style of the most important companies of the region. No projection of global ambition seems too far-fetched for the companies with big brand names originating in Northeast Asia. Since long, the successful Korean companies in the fields of automobile and telecommunication have gained parity with Japanese branch names in the field. It is only a matter of time that Chinese companies will become household names across the world.

Conceptualizing Northeast Asia on the basis of its economic potential is a matter of macro-economic fine-tuning. Conceptualizing Northeast Asia in a comprehensive way including geopolitical and regime considerations requires a broader focus. Its first premise must be the recognition of existing realities and trends. A Northeast Asian order will not evolve from scratch based on anybody's blueprint. As much as Northeast Asia is embedded in its historic legacies and ligatures, it is embedded in its wider ties and pre-defining constellations. It is unlikely at this point in history that Northeast

Asia will generate a regional order based on its own initiative alone. It is rather more predictable to assume that Northeast Asia might get increasingly involved in existing or newly emerging schemes with an external rooting. They could certainly be transformed over time by Northeast Asian interests and initiatives. And they could even experience the shifting of their center towards Northeast Asia and its leading countries. But without an external input, region-building in Northeast Asia is barely conceivable in the first decade of the 21st century. Three components can be found in the region and they might evolve over time into a new and comprehensive order for Northeast Asia, if not for the whole of East Asia.

Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) has become a loose scheme framing the vast region in the broadest possible way. The primacy of economic modernization and development has brought together all littoral states of the Pacific Ocean. Annual Summit meetings of the heads of state gain public attention, but all other activities of APEC are rather peripheral and lack the potential for a quantum leap in regional integration. The cooperative structure of APEC allows for the broadest possible inclusion of membership with a set of contradictions almost reminding of the United Nations. APEC, the official webpage operating from the APEC Secretariat in Singapore states, “is the only inter governmental grouping in the world operating on the basis of non-binding commitments, open dialogue and equal respect for the views of all participants”.³⁴ APEC has no treaty obligation and decisions are made by consensus among its 21 member states. APEC was founded in 1989 in order “to enhance economic growth and prosperity for the region and to strengthen the Asia-Pacific community”.³⁵ The reduction of tariffs and other trade barriers across the Asia-Pacific region has been the main objective of APEC activities “creating efficient domestic economies and dramatically increasing exports”.³⁶ It is hard to recognize APEC as an institution, yet scholars from the region claim it to

34 Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, <www.apecsec.org.sg/apec/about_apec.html>

35 Ibid. APEC membership includes: Australia, Brunei, Canada, Chile, People’s Republic of China, Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Papua New Guinea, Peru, Philippines, Russia, Singapore, Taiwan (labeled “Chinese Taipei”), Thailand, United States of America, Vietnam.

36 Ibid.

be “a central organ for Asian regionalism”.³⁷ For the time being, APEC vacillates between a consultative and a negotiation body.

Yet, in the long run APEC might evolve into a loose, almost informal net of ties across Asia-Pacific that uses its economic primacy as starting point in order to emulate some sort of Asian-Pacific identity. In doing so, it could become somewhat comparable to the role of the Council of Europe. APEC will most likely continue to lack political power while it continues to breed in the absence of the center-stage of either any of its members or any focused strategic objective beyond the growth of the economies in the region.

ASEAN +3 has been described as “the most important change in Asia-Pacific regionalism” since the economic and financial crisis of 1997, lauding its nature as “an Asia-only regional economic cooperation”.³⁸ ASEAN+3 has become the formula for growing approximation of China, Japan and South Korea towards the original ASEAN community, established in 1967. ASEAN is the closest structure comparable to a viable regional integration scheme in Asia, representing the collective will of its member nations “to bind themselves together in friendship and cooperation and, through joint efforts and sacrifices, secure for their peoples and for posterity the blessings of peace, freedom, and prosperity”.³⁹ Yet, in spite of a successful economic history of four decades, in spite of its original success in taming and stopping communist expansion in Southeast Asia, and in spite of its enlargement to former communist countries Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia as well as to the controversial Myanmar governed by authoritarian military rule, ASEAN has not been able to consistently implement structures or mechanisms of a supra-national character comparable to European integration. While this might turn out to be advantageous in order to fully incorporate China, Japan and South Korea at some point as ASEAN members, the absence of supra-national elements will most certainly redefine the original character of ASEAN and shift its center of

37 Hyun-Seok Yu, “Asian Regionalism: A Post-Crisis Perspective.” *Regional Integration: Europe and Asia – Compared*, eds. Woosik Moon/Bernadette Andreosso-O’Callaghan, op.cit.: 30.

38 Ibid.:38.

39 Association of Southeast Asian Nations, <www.aseansec.org/64.htm>

power towards Northeast Asia should its three leading economies join ASEAN one day. Its current absence means the absence of law-abiding mechanisms that generate predictable legal behavior.

With annual summit meetings of ASEAN+3, optimists consider this the beginning of an East Asian Community, and at least the frame for an eventual East Asian Free Trade Area. China has discovered ASEAN+3 as a valuable forum to project its interest of economic cooperation and match it with broader strategic considerations, shared by Japan and Korea. Taiwan finds itself marginalized as it is neither a member of ASEAN nor considered partner of the ASEAN+3 mechanism. This feeling of exclusion is shared by the US, which has warned the original ASEAN member states not to go too far in their cooperation with China. ASEAN's fear to be dominated by China is balanced by the fascination for the new rise of China. Since 1999, ASEAN and the representatives of China, Japan and South Korea have intensified their contacts and cooperation. ASEAN maintains a wide set of bodies and a broad array of activities, yet it is lacking the definite political commitment and decision-making mechanism that would constitute a regional integration system similar to the European experience. Should ASEAN over time embrace China, Japan and South Korea as full members, Southeast and Northeast Asia would move under one umbrella representing East Asia as a whole. This could turn from an economic block to a strategic asset, certainly in accordance with long-term Chinese interests in the region and vis-à-vis the United States. But it could likewise raise skepticism in Japan and worry in some of the smaller ASEAN countries because of likely Chinese dominance. It is, however, not inconceivable that such a development might evolve within a decade or so, underlining the primacy of the economy in current East Asian order-building.

An interesting component evolving from the original ASEAN has been the development of its ASEAN Regional Forum, established in 1994 and broadening the economic cooperation into the sphere of security and strategy. It must also be mentioned that ASEAN or ASEAN+3 has been identified as the conceivable format for the evolution of an East Asian currency

system.⁴⁰ So far, however, the emergence of conceptual thoughts has not been matched with a genuine political will among the main governments involved. While the potential of an East Asian currency system – and eventually of an East Asian monetary union – must be recognized, its implementation would clearly be a function of Chinese-Japanese strategic considerations. They, in turn, are a function of the overall Northeast Asian strategic landscape and development. By its nature, emphasis on the strategic perspectives for Northeast Asia strengthens the role and influence of the US. While APEC, although not of a strategic nature, has been US-sponsored and ASEAN and ASEAN+3 are “Asian-only” without US participation, the strategic future of Northeast Asia is inconceivable without a strong role played by the US. World War II, after all, has not been completely ended in Northeast Asia.

Confronted with the imminent danger of a North Korean nuclear bomb, the US, China, Japan, Russia, South Korea and North Korea came together in the first semi-formal multilateral security arrangement in Northeast Asia during several rounds of talks in 2003 and 2004. The US-sponsored “Six Party Talks” were originally directed to deal with the North Korean nuclear issue, one of the consequences of an overlap of World War II legacies, Cold War parameters and struggle for anti-Western national autonomy and primacy of national sovereignty in Northeast Asia. The withdrawal of North Korea from the “Six Party Talk” in 2004 did not make them obsolete. To the contrary, it is particularly in the interest of South Korea to maintain the format of the “Six Party Talks” and stretch its content beyond the nuclear issue to cover all other matters of security and cooperation in Northeast Asia.

The format of the “Six Party Talks” might serve as inspiration for the gradual evolution of a Northeast Asian security system. At best, it could evolve into a mechanism comparable with the “Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe” (CSCE), one of the key engines in helping to overcome the Cold War and the continental division in Europe. As the Cold War is

40 See Woosik Moon et.al., “Monetary Cooperation in East Asia.” *Regional Integration – Europe and Asia Compared*, eds. Woosik Moon/Bernadette Andreosso-O’Callaghan, op.cit.:134-152.

still alive in Northeast Asia as far as the partition of the Korean peninsula and the prevalence of the outlandish political and socio-economic system in North Korea is concerned, improvement in regional security cooperation can only be welcomed. As key member of the “Six Party Talks”-format, the continuous role of the United States as an Asian power would be guaranteed. Obvious is the absence of the European Union in the strategic discourse about the Northeast Asian security architecture. Given the enormous economic interest of Europe in the stable development of Northeast Asia, this is astonishing and reflects the limited global projection of the EU’s ambition for a comprehensive Foreign and Security, but also the limited interest of the United States and, most likely, also of China to include another external actor into the security conundrum of Northeast Asia. While the EU is a preferential partner of ASEAN and has successfully established an EU-Asian consultancy mechanism on economic and financial issues, the absence of the EU in the strategic discourse about the future of Northeast Asia is deplorable as far as Europe’s global interests are concerned.⁴¹

Europe is also absent as far as the formulation of any comprehensive concept for the future of political regimes and good governance in Northeast Asia is concerned. It is ambivalent in its relationship with China regarding the dissolution of the ban of arms export imposed upon its gigantic trade partner after the Tiananmen Square massacres of June 1989. The impact of its human rights policy and the promotion of rule of law in China have remained limited, not the least due to the growing self-assertiveness of the Chinese leadership. The EU is development aid-oriented (and almost non-political) in its policy of constructive engagement towards North Korea. It is apolitical in its economic relations with Taiwan and South Korea. And it is extremely low key as far as sharing historical experience with its partner Japan without getting involved in the usual moral rhetoric on matters related to Japan’s way of coming to terms (or rather: not properly coming to terms) with its legacy of World War II that is still highly irritating and frustrating many former victim nations in Asia, far beyond Northeast Asia. In light of the fact that Japan, after all, is a modern democratic state based in

41 On EU-ASEAN relations see Karen Smith, *European Union Foreign Policy in a Changing World*, Oxford: Polity, 2003: 69-96.

rule of law, its systemic antagonism to China – but probably even more so the different political culture of the two countries - is the ultimate reason for the recurrent misuse (by both sides) of historical issues and symbols as yardsticks of measuring the balance of power relationship between contemporary Japan and contemporary China. No matter the instrumental issue of history (used by China and Japan alike), the difference between rule of law democracy in Japan and one-party communist rule in China makes it unlikely, certainly for the time being, for both countries to play the same role France and Germany did play for European integration.⁴² China would have to grow into a completely different political and legal system to be able to become a systemically identical partner for Japan in playing such a role. Japan would have to change its attitude vis-à-vis symbolic nationalism (Prime Ministerial visits to the Yasukuni Shrine including), which is a permanent provocation of its neighbors.

The key experience of European integration - trust-based legal and political integration - cannot be achieved by means of security cooperation or economic interdependency. Both are tools to ease tensions or to contribute to the overall transformation of a zero-sum mentality into a win-win paradigm for all. But legally binding commitment to commonality and political mechanisms requires recognition of legitimate decisions beyond the modus of unanimity; integration must declare the principle of non-interference into the domestic affairs of any partner country obsolete. Therefore, systemic cohesion of governance and political culture alike are preconditions to substantial integration. They require mutual recognition of rule of law, democratic governance and a primacy for human rights. Unless there is no consensus on this – in real political life and not only on paper – Northeast Asia will remain tight to its historical legacy of obstacles to regional integration. Region-building might continue as a selective process of joint interest formation. But it will remain subject to unpredictable motions that are ultimately rooted in the difference and contradiction among obviously disparate political cultures and regimes in Northeast Asia.

42 For this suggestion see Christopher Dent, “Introduction: Northeast Asia – A Region in Search of Regionalism?”, *Northeast Asian Regionalism. Learning from the European Experience*, eds. Christopher M. Dent/David W.F.Huang, op.cit.: 9-10.

It seems to be an iron law that economic competition in Northeast Asia reinforces the region's fascination with big power politics, primacy of national sovereignty and skepticism for regional integration. However, it cannot be ruled out categorically that over time Northeast Asia's primacy for the economy will alter the role of politics. In doing so, Northeast Asia would have to redefine the relationship between politics and the economy, thus becoming the first post-modern region in which de-politicized trading states would transform their mutual political relations from big power primacy to cooperative and integrative regionalism only by way of economic means. With the recognition of the principle of "one country, two systems" in Hong Kong (since 1997) and in Macau (since 1999), the Chinese leadership in Beijing has demonstrated its potential for certain flexibility and creativity in the pursuit of national goals. But for the time being, it is hardly imaginable (but should not be fully excluded) that such an approach could succeed unchallenged as far as the future of Taiwan is concerned. In any case, the evolution of relations between the People's Republic of China and Taiwan remains the central test-case to prove skepticism about the dissolution of big power politics in Northeast Asia wrong. While both mainland China and Taiwan (and Taiwan's political parties) struggle over how to apply the principle of "one-China", they are even more bitterly divided over the legacy of ideological rifts whose power has begun to vanish. The first-ever visit of Taiwanese Kuomintang leader Lien Chan to mainland China in early 2005 was indicative of the potential path of reconciliation. Before meeting the Secretary General of China's Communist Party and Head of State, Hu Jintao, in Beijing, Lien Chan paid respect to Sun Yat Sen at his tomb in Nanking, revered by nationalists and communists alike as the founder of the anti-feudal, anti-imperial Chinese Republic. After their talks, Hu invoked the imminent great reawakening of the Chinese nation. Whether republicanism and a shared sense of material prosperity as road to reinvigorate China's global strength might ultimately suffice to overcome the ideological barriers and territorial splits of the Cold War remains to be seen. The transformation of the People's Republic of China from a rigid Maoist-Marxist country to a trading state under a patriotic, if not increasingly nationalistic one-party rule indicates the enormous Chinese potential

of pragmatism. Western notions of politics are probably too much burdened with legacies and scars of ideology to believe in the primacy of economic materialism. But in China, Confucian ethics and neo-patriotism might prove the universal applicability of Western notions of politics wrong.

The approximation and eventual reconciliation of mainland China and Taiwan might indeed follow a genuine East Asian logic of relations between business and politics, power and culture. As long as good-weather periods prevail, the competitive character of Northeast Asian economies might not trouble any of the regional actors in these efforts. But irritations or outright symptoms of crisis in either of the countries could. The sensitivity of the People's Republic of China to a possible Taiwanese Declaration of Independence – which Beijing considered a justification for military intervention across the Taiwan Straits as recent as in April 2005– is indicative. The unpredictable future of the divided Korean peninsula and the unpredictable social evolution in China as the downside of its economic rise are further matters of concern for Northeast Asia that could not be easily accommodated with the image of an evolving cultural community of cooperation. Estimates regarding the prospects of China's enormous modernization vary: While some Chinese analysts suggest that China might catch up with America's "comprehensive national power" (CNP) in 2020, others see China "reaching only 61 percent of America's and achieving a rank seventh in the world, even below that of South Korea, at 65 percent of America's CNP".⁴³ More pessimistic Chinese projections mention only 50, if not 40 percent of US comprehensive national power.⁴⁴ With an average growth rate of 10 percent per year during most of 1990 until 2005, China stands above all other economies in the world. Trade as percentage of its GDP has doubled once every decade since the late 1970s, from 5.2 percent in 1970

43 Samuel S. Kim, "Northeast Asia in the Local-Regional-Global Nexus". *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, op.cit.:25. "Comprehensive national power" (zonghe guoli) is a term used by Chinese social scientists covering a whole set of indicators in order to assess the overall performance and position of their country.

44 See Alastair Iain Johnston, "China's International Relations: The Political and Security Dimensions." *The International Relations of Northeast Asia*, ed. Samuel S. Kim, op.cit.: 77.

to 44 percent in 2001 (compared with 18 percent for Japan, 19 percent for the US and 20 percent for India). China has thus become the sixth largest trading country in the world, after the US, Germany, Japan, France, and the United Kingdom. Compared to a per capita income of \$40.000 in Japan and \$10.000 in South Korea, China is still poor with an average per capita income of around \$ 1.000. But the trend towards successful market-based modernization is as impressive as the size of the Chinese population guarantees a continuous expansion of the country's economy. As long as China's economy is booming, social tension, internal migration and the urban-rural divide are of secondary concern and might be accommodated. But what would happen in case of slowdown and crisis in China? The Chinese government has already struggled to tame the sometimes overheated economic boom while recognizing the dangerous urban-rural divide with 100 to 150 million surplus rural workers roaming between low-paid city jobs and rural unemployment.

While China is threatening its own success through the excesses of an overly booming modernization, North Korea's threat stems from failed modernization. As long as North Korea is a stable and sovereign state, it poses a potential threat to South Korea and a permanent tragedy to its own people. Yet, both these factors do not unravel the socio-economic and security web of Northeast Asia. But what would happen in case of an implosion of the system and a break-down of order in inter-Korean relations?⁴⁵ South Korean contingency plans for mass refugee movements and plans to absorb millions of North Koreans or to enabling them to lead a sustainable life in their own home are currently merely theoretical calculations. Fact of the matter is the secluded character of the regime in Pyongyang and the limited external influence that can be exerted on its actions. While Russia is pursuing a policy of restrained neutrality vis-à-vis North Korea, China and the

45 According to a 2004 opinion poll, 20 per cent of South Koreans would be ready to support North Korea in case of a military conflict on the peninsula. While the GDP of South Korea is thirty times bigger than that of North Korea, the development gap shall be leveled, according to the South Korean government, before any realistic confederative development might bring the two Korean states together. See Peter Sturm, *Das Unbekannte planen*, Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, No.26, February 1, 2005:10.

US see North Korea also as a function of their overall geopolitical relationship and its inherent struggle over primacy in Asian affairs. This makes South Korea the weakest chain in this equation. As long as the situation is stable and does not change fundamentally, “only” the North Koreans are suffering. Should the situation alter exponentially – no matter in which direction – South Korea’s impressive rise and stability and the overall Northeast Asian geopolitical and geo-economic landscape might suffer, too. In light of this prospect, it seems as if Northeast Asia is held hostage to North Korea’s unpredictability, which is the consequence of a combination of nationalist rivalries, ideological contradictions, Cold War paradigms and post-Cold War constructivist search for order. Northeast Asia’s strategic limbo is also a consequence of the unresolved structure of the long-term relationship between the US and China.

V.

The European Union is pursuing a policy of economic and technological cooperation with Northeast Asia as it does vis-à-vis Southeast Asia. But the EU has not been able to enlarge its interest and project its ability to contribute to the strategic development in Northeast Asia. It has also been ambivalent as far as the degree of its normative policy approach is concerned. While human rights matter a lot in EU rhetoric (“community of values”), in reality the primacy of the economy seems to dominate while the EU is too weak. The EU is also too weak, particularly vis-à-vis China, to pursue a policy of stringent human rights enforcement while simultaneously increasing economic cooperation. This conflict of aim seems always to be won by economic arguments. However, from its own experience the EU knows the limited potential of economic interconnectedness if political trust and commonly binding legal norms remain absent or limited; in this regard, Northeast Asia cannot be different from Europe. Northeast Asia, so it seems, is not only paradoxical to itself, but also to the European Union.

All the more challenging for Europe should be Francis Fukuyama’s suggestion to establish a multilateral system in Northeast Asia. “With the end of the Cold War and the continuing economic development of eastern Asia,”

he wrote, “power relationships are changing in ways that have unlocked nationalist passions and rivalries. The potential for misunderstanding and conflict among South Korea, Japan, and China will be significant in the coming years – but it can be mitigated if multiple avenues of discussion exist between the states.”⁴⁶ The plea for multilateralism in Northeast Asia by one of the leading conservative American academics should be a challenge and an encouragement for the European Union to contemplate and focus its own strategic interests in the region. But where is the EU while Americans begin to discuss Northeast Asian multilateralism, the dearest idea for many Europeans?

Fukuyama suggested to turn the multilateral security framework that has emerged in Northeast Asia under the label of “Six-Party Talks” into a “Five-Power Forum” – that is to say with US, Chinese, Japanese, South Korean and Russian participation without keeping North Korea on board. He anticipates such a “Five-Power Forum” to clearly become an “institutional innovation”.⁴⁷ Participation of the European Union in a potential Northeast Asian security forum was not mentioned by Fukuyama. While in the Middle East the EU is active and recognized partner of the “Quartet” (EU, US, UN, Russia) promoting a Road Map for the resolution of the conflict between Israel and the Palestinians, strategic considerations for the future of Northeast Asia evolve in the seemingly natural absence of a possible role for the European Union. Nobody else than the EU itself is to be criticized for this EU underperformance. It is on the EU to project its ideas and concepts for global order, also as far as Northeast Asia’s future is concerned. “A secure Europe in a better world”, as the EU’s Security Strategy is titled without discussing Northeast Asia in any relevant manner, will require such a broadening of the EU’s foreign policy horizon.⁴⁸ The sooner it will happen, the better for the interests of Europe.

46 Francis Fukuyama, “Re-Envisioning Asia.” *Foreign Affairs*, 1(2005):80-81.

47 *Ibid.*:83.

48 European Union, “A Secure Europe in a Better World: European Security Strategy, adopted by the Heads of State and Government at the European Council in Brussels on 12 December 2003”, Paris: European Union Institute for Security Studies, 2004.

In recognition of the difficulties and obstacles to regional integration in Northeast Asia, the EU could offer experience-based ideas that might be fruitful for the long-term evolution of region-building in Northeast Asia. While Fukuyama is suggesting “security first”, and most Asian analysts favor “economy first”, the EU must conceptualize its Northeast Asian strategy as one of “law first”. The promotion of norm-based interaction would contribute to turn suspicion and distrust in Northeast Asia into mutually advantageous and predictable patterns under common legal frames. It is not difficult to identify critical areas of modern life in which the enhancement of legal norms and predictable patterns of norm-based behavior could be a win-win-situation for all Northeast Asian countries and societies: The future development of telecommunication technologies and related regulatory matters, the evolution of medical research, environmental protection and sea safety, finally also the issue of commercial law and the terms of conduct for production, services and labor in Northeast Asia. This list might be prolonged, but it constitutes a beginning beyond the traditional neglect of the perspective of a common regional legal *acquis* and the traditional dominance of zero-sum-mentalities in North East Asia.

For the time being, Northeast Asian analysts are primarily interested in studying the experience of the European Union that led to the creation of a common European currency. Across Northeast Asia (and beyond), European Monetary Union is “considered a putative benchmark for understanding how a system of monetary cooperation might be devised in Asia”.⁴⁹ Beyond the economic and financial issue, Philomena Murray has discussed the historical, political, institutional and legal aspects of a possible emulation of the European experience in Northeast Asia (which she irritatingly summarizes as “Asia”). Some of her thoughts deserve to be reiterated: The common role of EU member states as donors of aid could be a particular inspiration for ASEAN+3, not the least as far as their relations with the impoverished Pacific Island nations is concerned. In this regard, one might imagine a broad array of possible cooperation between ASEAN and the

49 Philomena Murray, “Should Asia Emulate Europe?” *Regional Integration – Europe and Asia Compared*, eds. Woosik Moon/Bernadette Andreosso-O’Callaghan, op.cit.:197.

EU, which has defined its relations with the poor countries of the Pacific, Africa and the Caribbean since 2000 under the frame of the “Cotonou Agreement”.⁵⁰ Philomena Murray also reflected the possibility of institutional emulations based on the evolution of the European integration process.

It might indeed be worthwhile for the EU to engage its partners in ASEAN+3 in a dialogue about an appropriate East Asian mechanism similar to the European Council, to suggest to them a structure similar to the European Parliament (beginning with a delegated Assembly as was the EEC case), and, last but not least, to support the creation of an institution equivalent to the European Court of Justice. One should not forget some other aspects that were relevant in the European context and might carry food for thought in Northeast Asia: The dialectical importance of the interplay between “deepening” and “widening”, which in Europe were never mutually exclusive, but in the end always mutually reinforcing processes; the function of trial and error and notably the function of crises as an enabling engine of new integration dynamics; the potential of overlapping institutions, at least for some time – as was also the case in Europe with the parallel existence of EEC, Council of Europe and EFTA – to facilitate the gradual evolution of a comprehensive integration scheme; the meaning, and at times, usefulness of integration detours in order to reach the intended goal by way of recalibrating priorities, instruments, policies and even goals; finally, the usefulness of a “flexibility clause” facilitating the integration progress among partner countries more ready and capable of speeding up integration without excluding the commitment of late-comers.

ASEAN, in the words of Philomena Murray, remains “the most promising regional body in Asia”.⁵¹ Whether or not this nucleus of regional integration in South East Asia has the potential to grow into the nucleus of regional integration for the whole of East Asia can only be judged by history.

50 See Martin Holland, *The European Union and the Third World*, Houndmills: Palgrave, 2002.

51 Philomena Murray, “Should Asia Emulate Europe?” *Regional Integration – Europe and Asia Compared*, eds. Woosik Moon/Bernadette Andreosso O’Callaghan, op.cit.: 208.

But for the time being, ASEAN, and moreover ASEAN+3 indicate a potential of genuine autonomous developments in East Asia that has not been transferred into the arena of political will and a concise interest formulation. However, over time it should be in the interest of political leaders in South East and in North East Asia to concentrate their efforts on the creation of a genuine regional concept of order that frames, solidifies and protects their impressive socio-economic modernization. In the absence of a political order for the whole region, this socio-economic dynamism remains dependent upon contingent and external causes as far as its long-term viability is concerned. East Asia will need regional order-building to project and sustain its economic stability beyond the rationality of economics.

In the end, political constructivism will be necessary to establish a North East Asian (or even a comprehensive East Asian) regional order beyond economic rationality. Which type of leadership the political systems of North East Asia will generate during the next decade or so is a matter of speculation. It should however not come as a surprise if elements of cultural rationality will match economic rationality in defining the long-term interests of North East Asia. Should North East Asia project its global interests beyond the sphere of cooperative economic competition, it will have to design a political project that is autonomous and authentic. In the past, Northeast Asian political leadership has not been very impressive as far as the discourse on regional integration is concerned. Whether or not this might change in the years ahead is an open question. The incentives for politicians to position themselves as advocates for Northeast Asian regional integration are limited across Northeast Asia as long as a competitive national economic agenda dominates the political discourse in the region. Courage and long-term visions normally cannot rally voters in the region. Pragmatic economic concern matters most for the advancement of a political career. In so far, politics in Northeast Asia remains primarily a function of economic rationality while, at least so far, it is forfeiting its potential to promote the political and cultural logic of regional integration. This logic, however, is also limited by objective regime differences across the region.

Northeast Asia: Obstacles to Regional Integration

Against this background, it should be in the interest of the European Union to project itself as an “Asian power” by contributing to a reassessment of the usefulness of regional integration in Northeast Asia through cooperative advice and by offering participation in any emerging multilateral security scheme in Northeast Asia. For the time being, the EU is still limiting its Asian policies to bilateral relations largely of an economic nature. This is neither specific nor substantial enough to ultimately deal with the leading countries of this vast continent, the North East Asian powers China, Japan and South Korea including. The value of a regular “Asia-Europe Meeting” (ASEM) remains limited as long as it does not turn from consultative diplomacy to cooperative regionalism. This will require a transformation of the EU’s strategy in dealing with its ASEAN+3 partners. The EU would need a long-term strategy based on the primacy of multilateralism and integration and with a focus on the possible contributions of the EU to the emulation of relevant institutional and conceptual processes in Northeast Asia.

1996 marked the beginning of the process of the “Asia-Europe Meeting” (ASEM). Taking place every two years, summit meetings of Heads of State and Government of all EU member states and the countries of ASEAN+3 are characterized by informality, multidimensionality and emphasis on equal partnership.⁵² In the meantime, 39 partners are coming together, for the last time in October 2004 in Hanoi. Annual ministerial meetings contribute to intensified interaction and consultation on a variety of international and bi-regional issues. The European Union however has not been able to introduce the conceptual development of regional order-building in East Asia into the ASEM agenda yet. Before doing so, the EU will be advised to formulate a comprehensive strategy that includes the preferable elements of a consultative exchange of thoughts on this matter and the instruments at hand for the EU’s Foreign and Security Policy to impact a possible follow-up to any general strategic discussion. The EU simply needs a policy strategy for Northeast Asia, or probably more meaningful, a

52 European Union, “The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)” www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/asem/intro. So far ASEM summits were held in Bangkok (1996), London (1998), Seoul (2000), Copenhagen (2002) and Vietnam (2004).

comprehensive policy strategy for East Asia, that goes beyond a shallow diplomatic communiqué. It should emphasize EU interests, goals and means with particular reference to the advantages of regional order-building in Northeast Asia with EU contribution and participation.

During the Sixth ASEM summit, due in Europe in 2006, the EU could suggest to launch a comprehensive and joint study of the potential for regional-order building and law-based economic and political integration in ASEAN+3 as part of the evolution of a process that could lead to a bi-regional association agreement with the EU (analogous to the EU-MERCOSUR negotiation of a similar agreement that is currently underway). Also in the context of EU-ASEAN+3 relations the EU would find scope for the promotion of reflections about the advantages of law-based regional integration over the stubborn pursuit of sovereignty-based big power politics. Even if, for the time being, this would largely remain an academic endeavor, only the EU is available to support this topic as part of the overall agenda of European-Asian relations.

The EU should become proactive in order to make sure that the “Six Party Talks” on the North Korean nuclear issue – restarted in July 2005 after one year of suspension – will include contributions of the European Union. A visit of the EU’s High Representative and the Commissioner for Foreign Affairs to Pyongyang in May 2001, a series of political dialogues on the level of high civil servants, and 393 million Euro humanitarian aid between 1995 and 2005, which includes 115 million Euro in support of the Korean Peninsula Energy Development Organization (KEDO),⁵³ must be understood as the basis for a more political involvement in the next phase of multilateral activities regarding the Korean Peninsula. The EU will not be able to legitimize its financial input into the alleviation of the Korean crisis if its representatives will not be included into any meaningful institutionalized form of multilateral mechanism regarding the security of Northeast Asia. EU taxpayers will not allow this to happen a second time. The EU should have learned this lesson from the experience with its financial sup-

53 European Union. “The EU’s relations with the Democratic Republic of Korea” www.europa.eu.int/comm/external_relations/north_korea/intro/index: 3-4.

port of the Palestinian Authority in the Middle East: For a long time, it seemed as if the EU was only welcome in the Middle East as a financial donor, while political matters were considered in the absence of the EU. Criticism in the EU about this semi-servile participation in Middle East politics grew and, in the end, only the EU's inclusion in the Middle East "Quartet" justified the enormous financial contribution of the EU to the Middle East peace process. This analogy should be kept in mind in the context of any emerging security structure for and in Northeast Asia. The EU must project its political will to be recognized as one of the facilitating and mediating powers in Northeast Asia. Otherwise, its claim to be a global partner would lose credibility, its financial contributions would face increased criticism of EU taxpayers, and the overall EU interests in Northeast Asia would be undermined.

As for leadership in Northeast Asian integration-building, the European Union should identify the normative preconditions necessary to proceed with realistic developments. It should therefore identify South Korea and Japan as potentially the first architects for the promotion of a Northeast Asian political integration mechanism. South Korea and Japan are the only solidly democratic countries in the region. They are the leading economies as far as the level of modernization and human development is concerned. They are OECD members and have demonstrated cooperation even in such fields as jointly organizing the World Soccer Tournament in 2002. Yet, the political relationship between both countries is still overshadowed by Korean suffering under Japanese colonial rule and the subsequent war that led to the division of the Korean people and their homeland. Instead of continuously speculating about a possible Korean reunification, it would probably be more appropriate to contemplate the potential of South Korean and Japanese efforts to launch the first steps of a Northeast Asian integration scheme that recalls the experience and ambition of the European Community of Coal and Steel.

The 2005 controversy between Japan and South Korea over Dokdo, a tiny island between Korea and Japan, could have been used in its catalytic function: The struggle over Dokdo was not about its territory or about historical arguments of right or wrong. It was primarily about the natural resources

surrounding the island, and moreover it was about pride and power in Northeast Asia. Why could Dokdo therefore not serve the purpose of being identified as an appropriate object to trigger a process of law-based integration among Northeast Asia's leading democracies? Here would be an issue that could serve to establish a common supranational authority with a limited purpose over a specified matter. As this was, by and large, the definition and intention of the architects of the European Community of Coal and Steel, one might wonder if and where a "Korean Jean Monnet" could appear. He or she would have to propose a joint authority over Dokdo and the related resources between South Korea and Japan. South Korea, Japan's past victim, would have to go a long way indeed to accept such a visionary proposal. But no other country in Northeast Asia could generate the moral authority in impressing its neighbor and the world with such a proposal. And no country in the region other than Japan should proof its democratic maturity by embracing such an initiative by South Korea. This idea might sound like a strange dream, and it is so at the moment. But when studied in a broader perspective and with long-term considerations, there hardly seems a better opportunity for the two leading democratic trading states in Northeast Asia to begin an exceptional historical journey by bridging the waters that divide their shores through common authority over an island that is too small to be recognized by the world for its damaging potential.

As for China, the EU must become more normative if its wants to be recognized as a global leader. Currently, the EU is contributing 100 million Euro for measures to support China's integration into the international community and the global economy. With three million Euro annual investments in China and trade amounting to an annual sum of 150 billion Euro, the EU has every interest to promote China's inclusion into the international economy, which has gone already an impressively long way since the beginning of reforms in China in 1978. The perspective of lifting the weapons embargo against China would caricature the EU's efforts. Instead, the EU should rather address the discrepancies emanating from China's WTO membership: The difficult provision of licenses to banks, insurance companies and telecommunication companies and matters of product piracy are issues of continuous complain in Europe. The EU's readiness to

recognize China as market economy will not be strengthened if such Chinese actions will prevail. As for human rights, the EU would be advised to insist on China signing the International Covenant on Political and Civil Rights. The EU must insist on this recognition of international norms by China in order to prevent that the rise of China will end up in a new variant of nationalism, which is relativistic about universal norms. Such a development would be a paradoxical yet unhappy revision of China's traditional universalism. Recognizing the UN Covenant on Political and Civil Rights by China would, *inter alia*, facilitate the return of alleged Chinese refugees from Europe. Most importantly, it would facilitate the dialogue about human rights and rule of law in China, particularly as far as the freedom of religion is concerned. For the time being, it is more than regrettable that freedom of religion remains a highly limited right in today's China.

In this context, the EU would also serve the purpose of a universal human rights dialogue if it would suggest to its Northeast Asian partners a normative debate about the implications of progress in medical research. The development of stem-cell research is not an unrelated matter. At the core of the debate must be the dialogue about those values and religious norms constituting human anthropology. A dispute between proponents of Buddhist concepts of reincarnation – justifying, for instance, therapeutic cloning as a way to facilitate the rebirth of a weak embryo in the body of a strong and presumably healthier person – and Christian notions of the inalienability and uniqueness of the human person from the moment of conception to the last breath of life, would certainly be of high quality and meaning for the inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue in the world. Together with its Northeast Asian partners, the EU could encourage such a dialogue among representative of religions and civil society.

In dealing with its Northeast Asian partners, the EU will encounter resistance to multilateral and post-sovereigntist integration approaches by countries which combine self-confidence with traditional concepts about the primacy of big power politics and a limited recognition of the political character and global strategic role of the European Union. This should not prevent the EU from conceptualizing its authentic policy strategy for Northeast Asia. The application of European concepts of order-building

and pooled sovereignty as alternative to big power politics, balance of power strategies and political mistrust coupled with competitive economies will never be easy in Northeast Asia. Whether or not this is only a matter of limited leadership qualities among Northeast Asian politicians will be tested by history. Yet, the EU should promote conceptual ideas of order-building that transcend the contemporary myopic agenda of the region. That is what the EU owes to its self-asserted claim to be a global partner. And it needs to raise its profile in order to have any change of being taken seriously as a global power in Northeast Asia.

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