

## Public Diplomacy Coalitions with the Global South.

East Asia as the next  
global center of gravity

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Carolina G. Hernandez

**There is no doubt that much of the world's prominent figures in the political, economic, and other spheres have increasingly regarded the Asia-Pacific region and particularly East Asia as the next global center of gravity. Not only are the economic powerhouses located in this region, but also the global strategic shifts are expected to take place in it. Also to their own benefit, Germany and the EU should undertake a mapping exercise of public diplomacy coalitions in the region, and secondly, redefine and even repackage themselves in these coalitions.**

Members of the region's track 2 community whose networks span the Asia-Pacific and beyond have noted – with varying levels of interest – a great

change in attitude towards the region. Where in the recent past little interest in East Asia (other than China and Japan) could be seen from outside the region, in the last few years a growing interest in other parts – including the ten countries collectively known as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – has become manifest. Part of the changing understanding of East Asia beyond Northeast Asia can be attributed to ASEAN's ability to reframe the region, for example by bringing together North-east and Southeast Asia in the ASEAN-initiated East Asia Summit (EAS).

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### Engaging East Asia

The European Union (EU) and its member states have already shown readiness to engage East Asia. Already back in 1996, the EU has put in place the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), which has become a useful vehicle for engaging East Asia. Annual summits have been held in alternating regional locations since its establishment, and its membership has expanded from the original 25 to its current 53. Furthermore, its structure has evolved to include relevant stakeholders in and outside governments, including civil society and the media. At the ASEM Summit in Milan in October 2014, think tank organizations as well as other non-governmental groups such as the media, were invited to participate and engage.

#### Definition

Track 2 is here understood as a principal unofficial source of policy inputs to track 1 decision-making processes (i.e. official decision-making by government officials). Although it was originated as a dialogue process including all relevant stakeholders on a given issue (from in and out of government offices) where participants are invited in their private capacity, track 2 became popularly known as a dialogue process involving think tanks, academic and epistemic communities.

Yet, the sense among those that have followed ASEM since its creation is that it remains relatively invisible – both in Europe and Asia. An important illustration of its invisibility is the already mentioned Milan Summit: The bilateral meetings between various heads of states were covered by media without making further reference to the occasion in which they took place.

Surely, the ASEM processes can be improved through more effective communication strategies and increased inter-regional interactions between the summits – among its various sectors in the public and private spheres. However, its huge membership can be daunting, especially as it really goes beyond East Asia. Might it be better then to create a different platform on which to launch new partnerships or alliances for global public goods in general? And how can a more mutually beneficial and less asymmetrical relationship between the EU in general and Germany in particular with the Global South in general and East Asia in particular be achieved?

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### Origin and growth of track 2 diplomacy in East Asia

In many ways, public diplomacy is a kindred activity to the informal policy-oriented dialogues conducted among like-minded participants to shape official policy. An important example of such informal policy-oriented dialogues is track 2 diplomacy, which started, evolved, and became popular and influential in East Asia during the 1980s and 1990s. During that time, a group of individuals established an unofficial counterpart of the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) process, thus giving birth to the Asia-Pacific's first track 2 body, known as the Pacific Economic Cooperation Council (PECC).

Like most 21st century trans-border movements, governments' aspiration to achieve economic growth, development, and prosperity spurred the rise and growth of track 2 diplomacy. Soon, informal political-security processes and bodies were formed in East Asia and the broader Asia-Pacific region. Among the prime movers are the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS) and the Council for Asia-Pacific Security Cooperation (CSCAP).

Inspired by the success of the intergovernmental Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) which tempered strategic rivalries in Europe during the Cold War, the CSCAP – although being

non-governmental and unofficial – has become an important feature of the region's complex regional security architecture. It provides policy inputs primarily to the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) but its study groups' memoranda on the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) also received the overwhelming acceptance of the United Nations Secretary-General.

The ASEAN ISIS was a critical force in the establishment of CSCAP. Despite serious challenges, it remains Southeast Asia's principal political-security track 2 body and the only group to be found in the ASEAN Charter's list of "Entities Associated with ASEAN". Through its various public diplomacy activities, ASEAN ISIS has managed to engage not only influential policy makers from Southeast Asia, but also played a crucial role in engaging actors from 'reclusive' regimes and governments – including China following Deng Zhao Ping's fortuitous policy of 'opening to the world', Vietnam in the 1980s, Burma/Myanmar during the military junta's State Law and Order Restoration Council and its reframed State Peace and Development Council and North Korea since the 1990s. Its like-minded stakeholders have provided intellectual inputs to ASEAN policy makers on difficult issues such as environmental security, human rights and democracy in the 1990s, maritime disputes in the South China Sea since the 1990s (including in thinking about the elements for a Code of Conduct on the South China Sea in the first decades of the 21st century) and ASEAN community-building through its three pillars (political security, economic, and socio-cultural). In these activities, ASEAN ISIS has used public diplomacy as its principal vehicle.

Thus, it is no wonder that major official aid agencies, such as the Korea Foundation, have an important set of public diplomacy programs dealing with intellectual exchanges among a variety of stakeholders across societies. And it is not purely coincidental that the propagation of a positive international image of key Southeast Asian countries during the 1980s-1990s (like Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and Vietnam) as well as their rapid economic growth came in the wake of active public diplomacy undertaken by track 2 in support of track 1 goals.

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### Recommendations for the EU and Germany

It is extremely important for the EU and Germany to embark on building public diplomacy coalitions – not only in East Asia, but also in Africa, Latin

America and other parts of the huge Asian continent. After all, the emerging economies are spread across the world, not only in the BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) but also in the so-called next 11 economies that are projected to follow the path of rapid growth.

All that it takes is a partnership among like-minded actors (in and out of the public sector) to build global public diplomacy coalitions. These should be based on the principles of equal partnership, equal access to and equitable distribution of global public goods, such as peace and prosperity, which these coalitions are likely to produce, and a wide global ownership – of both the process and the outcomes of these coalitions. Needless to say, the movers and shakers of these public diplomacy coalitions need to be persons of impeccable integrity and capabilities.

In this regard, Germany and the EU, first of all need to undertake a mapping exercise of public diplomacy coalitions from the Global South that have played significant roles in shaping foreign and security policies of their respective regions in general. In particular they should focus on coalitions with commendable track records in building bridges among themselves as well as with East Asia and/or Europe. In the African context, an example is the African Security Sector Network (ASSN), a pan-African group with links to Great Britain, France, Sweden and Switzerland, among others in Europe, as well as to Asia and Latin America and the United

Nations. While dedicated to Security Sector Reform, its inter-regional and global links can be tapped for other public diplomacy purposes as well. Secondly, there is a need for the EU and Germany to redefine and even repackage themselves in these coalitions – particularly if the main target region is East Asia. As already noted, the narrow focus on China and Japan in the past needs to be widened and should include other relevant East Asian players, such as ASEAN members, many of them former European colonies, as well. A reframing of this old relationship is an imperative of the times. East Asians no longer wish to be talked down to. And finally, there is no better way than to ensure that EU and German interests in East Asia go beyond economics. Here, public diplomacy of a multidimensional kind is of utmost importance.

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