

European Pivots to Southeast Asia: Leaving the EU-ASEAN Corridors?

**By
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ASEAN's central role in Asia-Pacific regional architecture has provided platform for external parties to be able to participate and few of European countries has expressed its desire to be able to participate. Does the EU long wait to be accepted in ASEAN's regional mechanism has making its Member States follow its own path?

The visit of French Foreign Minister

On the first week of August, the French Foreign Minister Laurent Fabius made a visit to Jakarta and called on the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Secretariat Secretary-General Le Loung Minh in the margins of a three-days trip meant to build a strategic partnership with Indonesia – French President François Hollande may follow him soon. At the Secretariat, the Minister Fabius delivered a public address on French's policy in Asia.

This is the first time a member of the French Government has visited the Secretariat and delivered Paris's point of views on Asia-Pacific. On his public address, he emphasized French desires to be present in Asia-Pacific and has undertaken similar pivot like the US but not primarily on military. Furthermore he explained the French pivot is more diplomatic to developing ties with the whole Asia-Pacific countries and follow by the economic pivot to robust France exports as well as delivering "human" pivot to enhance socio-cultural ties among the French and Southeast Asian peoples.

Even though the Minister Fabius mentioned that French's pivot is not focus on military, but he informed that the French was the first European country to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC) in 2007 and would like to maintain this pioneering role in the implementation of cooperation for peace and security with ASEAN in the future by expressed its desire to participate in the ASEAN Defense Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+), an ASEAN's sectoral body on military engagement with its Dialogue Partners (except Canada and the EU).

While on behalf of the European Union (EU), Minister Fabius calls on an ASEAN-EU pact to build an organized multipolar world in which the ASEAN and EU play a stabilizing role as he claimed that the world is increasingly interconnected and interdependent and both ASEAN and the EU share common concerns yet collective action appears to be lagging behind.

Meanwhile the Other Europeans

Beside Paris, recently London has shifted its diplomatic network to Asia-Pacific to embrace the remarkable economic growth in this region for the UK's economic and prosperity to enjoy multibillion trades. One of the most significant evidence is more British politicians visited Southeast Asian countries since 2012 until present than at any time in the past 20 years. The UK also has acceded the TAC on June 2012 to signal Britain's commitment to the region and pave the way for deeper engagement. By joining the TAC also show Britain engagement with ASEAN nations on security issues to ensure the UK's prosperity be fully enjoyed in an environment of security and stability.

Different stories with the German. To win ASEAN's heart, Germany supports the process of ASEAN integration and assist ASEAN institutions by contribute 10 million Euro for strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat through its international development agency, *Die Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)*. Meanwhile to support regional economic integration, environment and climate change, 60 million Euro have been allocated to these issues since 2005.

Unlike the French and British who would like to increase their political profiles in the region as well as participated in regional security activities such as ADMM+ and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) possibly in the future, it seems that the German's pivot to Southeast Asia has shown little favor to have engagement on political and security issues and much more emphasizing on trade and economic ties.

By Passing the EU-ASEAN Corridor?

European countries pivots to Southeast Asia is not just about embracing the emerging market for their respective economic benefits due to the slower economic growth in other part of the world, but the pivot also could be seen as European countries return to Asia-Pacific in terms of increasing its country political profiles also to be able to address and "play" in regional conflict resolution such as the maritime disputes of South China Sea or even the most serious one, the North Korea nuclear issue.

The ASEAN central role in the region has provided political and security frameworks for external parties to participate in regional architecture as stated above such as the ADMM+, ARF and East Asia Summit (EAS). Until now, the EU only participate at the ARF.

Among the ten ASEAN's Dialogue Partners (Australia, Canada, China, EU, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia and the United States) only Canada and the EU who is not party to the ADMM+ and EAS. Beside the fact that the EU does not meet the requirements to enter the ADMM+ due to lack engagement with Southeast Asian countries in terms of security ties, there is also a view within the ASEAN Member States that questioning the EU's capacity in this regards. Meanwhile for the EAS, although not officially announced, on September 2012 the former ASEAN Secretary General Dr. Surin Pitsuwan informed that there is now a moratorium on new membership in the EAS while the forum takes stock of its role and digests its most recent members, Russia and the US.

The French officials statement by the Minister Fabius on its desire to join the ADMM+ could be seen as alternative way for European countries to be able participate in Southeast Asia regional architecture instead of waiting unclearly when the EU will be accepted in these regional mechanisms. This statement also could encourage other European countries to have such an engagement with ASEAN directly in terms of political and security matters as well as addressing regional issues.

Noting that ASEAN only considers the EU as its Dialogue Partners would make European countries meet difficulties to address their interests and able participate in regional mechanism frameworks. However, now the option is on respective European countries, whether would like to wait unclearly until the EU fully participate on ASEAN's regional political-security frameworks or would like to follow its on step to have a greater participation on Asia-Pacific regional architecture.

Bio:

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