The EU an Actor Sui Generis? A Comparison of EU and ASEAN Actorness

Abstract

Conceptions of the European Union (EU) as an international actor are not new. However, a great deal of the literature regards the EU as *sui generis* in nature and lacking in external capabilities when compared to nation-states. Other regional organizations, such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) fare even worse. This article notes that we need to move beyond a state-centric view of world politics to assess the actor capabilities, nascent or advanced, of other players in the global arena, particularly regional organizations. It argues that ASEAN too is emerging as an international actor.

Key Words: EU, ASEAN, Actorness

Introduction[*]

This article examines the actorness of two regional organizations and provides a timely comparative analysis of the EU and ASEAN. It is generally accepted that the EU, under certain circumstances, behaves as an international actor. However, the EU is often treated as a special case, not really fitting the prevailing concepts of International Relations. This often prevents a meaningful comparison of the EU with other cases of regionalism. We still know very little about regional actorness beyond the EU or about the circumstances under which regional organizations emerge as international actors.

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[*] I would like to thank the anonymous reviewers for their helpful comments.

This article, therefore, calls for a more nuanced understanding of regional actorness. International Relations to date still lacks a systematic and comprehensive discussion of actorness beyond the state. The literature on actorness is scattered across new regionalism studies, social constructivism and European Studies.[1] This limits our understanding of contemporary world politics. The article demonstrates the relevance of European Studies to International Relations by discussing the contributions of the EU actorness literature to new regionalism scholarship. From these literatures, it extrapolates a set of criteria for the analysis of regional organizations as international actors.

The article uses a comparative perspective by contrasting the EU with ASEAN as emerging international actors. Both organizations represent very different cases with ASEAN's informal approach contrasting with the EU's institutionalized regionalism. Yet, ASEAN too appears to be emerging as an international actor. Consider, for instance, the 2010 Asia Europe Meeting (ASEM), where the ASEAN Secretary General, Surin Pitsuwan, participated alongside ASEAN member states.

The article begins by setting out the conceptual problems faced by students of comparative regionalism. It provides a brief overview of the existing literature on regional actorness, drawing out a set of ideational and institutional criteria which is then applied to a systematic comparison of the EU and ASEAN as international actors.

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[1] 'European Studies' refers here to the large and growing body of scholarship on European integration, studying the evolution of EU institutions and the development of EU policy-making procedures.

Regional Organizations and Actorness

Some Conceptual Issues

Students of comparative regionalism face two methodological obstacles (De Lombaerde et al 2010, Genna and De Lombaerde 2010). The first is the dominance of EU-centric approaches to regional integration. This carries with it its own specific problems – a focus on the uniqueness of the European experience, of seeing the EU as *sui generis*, giving rise to the so-called *n = 1* problem. A related issue is the 'teleological prejudice informed by the assumption that "progress" in regional integration is defined in terms of EU-style institutionalization' (Breslin et al 2002: 11). Thus, regionalisms that deviate from the standard EU 'model' (such as, for example, ASEAN or Mercosur) are regarded as weak and inefficient. Ironically, therefore, European integration and the spectre of the EU loom as some of the largest obstacles to the development of comparative regionalism.[2]

The second problem is conceptual in nature. The literature lacks a framework to support comparative endeavors. For instance, there is little agreement on how to define a 'region'. It is seen as a 'container-concept' with multiple meanings (De Lombaerde et al. 2010: 736). The main problem is identifying the distinctiveness of a particular geographic space as a unit characterised by enhanced political, economic and social interaction (see Väyrynen 1997, Mansfield and Milner 1999). However, an

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[2] Noteworthy examples of comparative regionalism include Laursen (2010), Robinson, Rosamond and Warleigh-Lack (2011), Farrell, Hettne and van Langenhove (2005), Acharya and Johnston (2007) and Breslin et al (2002).

overemphasis on regional idiosyncrasies would thwart any meaningful comparisons between different regions. Here, much can be gleaned from the new regionalism approach (NRA)[3] that, among other things, focuses on the construction and deconstruction of regions (see Hettne 1996, 2003, 2007 and 2011, Hettne and Söderbaum 2002, Söderbaum and Sbragia 2010). The construction of a region can be driven by some common interests, or the perception thereof, and results in the formation of a particular regional identity that Hettne, one of the main proponents of NRA, calls *regioness* (Hettne 1996, 2003). Emerging in the 1990s, NRA locates regional phenomena within the context of globalisation and systemic (extra-regional) forces rather than concentrating on intra-regional factors, which remains a feature of a significant proportion of scholarship on European integration (see Söderbaum and Sbragia 2010 and Warleigh-Lack and Rosamond 2010). Most importantly, Hettne's regioness concept underlines the possibility for regional agency and the construction of a regional space. Regions, like states, are 'political and social projects, devised by human actors in order to protect or transform existing structures' (Hettne and Söderbaum 2002: 38).[4]

Hettne and Söderbaum (2002) have developed a continuum of regioness along which individual regions can be located. Like states, regions possess a geographically contiguous area, a *regional space*. Increasing social contacts and transactions on a cross-regional basis can transform this regional space into a *regional complex*, which could then develop into a *regional society* as cross-border regional transactions intensify and a number of non-state actors transcend national spaces to participate in regional governance. By the fourth level of regioness, a *regional community*, the

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[3] The best overview of the NRA to date has been published by Söderbaum and Shaw (2003).

[4] See also Franke and Ross (2010).

region emerges as an active subject with its own distinct identity. The fifth and highest level of regioness is the emergence of a so-called *region-state*. This typology of regions has several advantages. It is flexible and non-hierarchical. And, most importantly for comparative purposes, it is applicable to a wide range of regional projects.

We also need clarity on what we mean by *regional integration*. Regional integration may be defined as the 'creation and maintenance of intense and diversified patterns of interaction among previously autonomous units, which may be economic, political and social in character' (Wallace 1992: 9). Regional integration is closely linked to *regionalism* and *regionalisation*. Regionalism is 'associated with a programme and strategy, and may lead to formal institution building. "Regionalisation" denotes the (empirical) process that leads to patterns of cooperation, integration, complementarity and convergence within a particular cross-national geographical space' (Hettne and Söderbaum 2002: 34). Combining regionalism and regionalisation in one definition, this article defines regional integration as:

> a state-driven process of increasing economic, political or social
> interdependencies. Some form of institutionalization accompanies this process,
> and non-state actors may play a role. It leads to the creation of new
> transnational political, economic or social spaces and it can result in the
> evolution of new regional norms, interests and even new identities.

This definition takes into account the diversity of regional projects, not all of which have a strong political component. Indeed, even a cursory glance at the EU and ASEAN highlights that different regional projects have different degrees of

institutionalization. Now that we have some understanding of regions and regionalism, the next step is to draw up a set of criteria that will help us operationalize actorness.

Drawing up Regional Actorness Criteria

There is a problem in the way in which the EU and regional organizations in general are accommodated within a large section of the International Relations literature. Orthodox rationalist conceptions of world politics view international affairs as an arena for the state. The relations between states define the nature of the international system. Regional organizations such as ASEAN and the EU play no decisive role in such accounts. This state-centrism is evident in the realist/ neorealist school which regards international relations as a continuous struggle for power between states in a system characterized by anarchy (Morgenthau 1948, Waltz 1979). In such a world, regional organizations such as the EU and ASEAN are nothing more then instruments of state power (see Leifer 1980, Hoffmann 1982, Grieco 1995, Fry 2000, Rüland 2000).

Neoliberalism too focuses on the state in international affairs. The approach widens the agenda to focus on so-called 'low politics' (such as economics). States face a collective action problem in an anarchical environment. They set up international institutions to overcome coordination and free-rider problems (see Krasner 1983, Keohane 1984). This leaves organizations like the EU and ASEAN as facilitating arenas for regional cooperation with no actorness of their own, placing them in the same category as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade.

In contrast, constructivism questions the dichotomy between structure and agency in international relations and points to the importance of cultural and ideational forces (Wendt 1992, 1999, Risse 2000). International institutions are not only shaped by their members, but they in turn also tend to shape the identities and interests of member-states, opening the door for discussions about ideational aspects and the social construction of actorness. Research addressed in this context includes, for instance, Europeanization and the transformative impact of EU norms and values on EU member-states (Risse and Wiener 2001: 202) and interesting questions about the transnational identities of the EU and ASEAN (see Whitman 1998, Manners and Whitman 2003, Gilson 2005 and Lawson 2009).

Constructivist research has had an important impact on the new regionalism literature (Hettne and Söderbaum 2002: 36-7). Equally important, however, has been the influence of European Studies literature. Indeed, conceptualizations of actorness are a good example for how European Studies may overcome its troubled relationship with International Relations by generating exchange in both directions (see Warleigh-Lack 2011: 17).

Gunnar Sjöstedt (1977), for instance, focused on *actor capacity*, allowing for a differentiation between strong and weak actors in the international system, and purposive action with respect to others, allowing us to distinguish between being an international actor and being an *effective* international actor. It is possible for an entity to be unsuccessful with its external policies while still being recognized as an international actor. The actorness of states, for example, is not assessed by the

effectiveness of individual foreign policy initiatives. States are actors simply because they are recognized and accepted as such by their own citizens and by external others.

In the 1990s, the Treaty of European Union (TEU) and the introduction of a common foreign and security policy pillar (CFSP) were seen as key developments in the emergence of the EU as an international actor. The end of the Cold War removed significant barriers to the EU's engagement with and enlargement in Eastern Europe. It enabled the development of more coherent foreign policy cooperation, including the creation of a foreign defense policy and, eventually common defense. With it a whole new generation of scholars began to take interest in EU actorness.[5] For instance, David Allen and Michael Smith (1991, 1998) added to our understanding by introducing *presence*, defined as the legitimacy and capacity to act and to mobilize resources, and the perception an actor generates about itself. Michael Smith (1998) also reassessed the relationship between power and actorness. For instance, the EU's Common Commercial Policy and the Common Agricultural Policy have a far greater impact on the developing world than often acknowledged. Bretherton and Vogler (2006) took us towards a more operationalizable framework with their focus on *presence* (the relationship between international developments and external expectations), *opportunity* (external dynamics that might foster or hinder the construction of EU actorness) and *capacity* (the capabilities necessary to respond to opportunities and external expectations). They identify four requirements for actorness: shared values and principles, the ability to formulate coherent policies, policy instruments, and the legitimacy of decision-making processes.

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[5] See Herrberg (1998), Jupille and Carporaso (1998) and Ginsberg (1999).

The EU clearly acts in international relations although it is often not considered to be a fully-fledged actor. Christopher Hill (1993) identified a so-called capability-expectations gap that had emerged between what the EU increasingly was expected to do and the means and capacities it actually possessed. He came to the conclusion that the EU was not an effective international actor. This was underlined by the breakup of Yugoslavia, the crisis in Kosovo and the inability of the EU to formulate a coherent foreign policy position in response to the Iraq crisis in 2003. Skeptics, therefore, argue that the EU at best has the *potential* to be an international actor. For the moment, however, its foreign policies are diffuse and divided. So are the interests of EU member-states.

European Studies scholarship has highlighted many important aspects of the EU as an international actor. However, it can be argued that these efforts possess limited, if any, applicability outside the EU context. While being rich in explanatory content regarding the particularities of the EU, such approaches leave very little room for generalization. There has been a great deal of intellectual cross-fertilization between European Studies and new regionalism scholarship on this issue. The influence of constructivist identities on regional actorness is a well-established theme within the new regionalism literature. This has also made an impact on our understanding of the EU.[6] Hettne uses the concept *actorship* to describe the ability to exert influence on the external world (Hettne 2007, 2010 and 2011). He explicitly bases his framework on Bretherton and Vogler. Actorship, for Hettne, is composed of subjective, historical and structural dimensions. It is constructed by three inter-acting components: *regioness* (internal integration and identity formation), *presence* (in terms of size,

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[6] See for instance Whitman (1998).

economic strength and military power) and *actorness* (the capacity to act purposively in international affairs) (Hettne 2011: 28). Doidge (2008) too has attempted to address the problem of conceptualizing regional actorness by drawing on European Studies scholarship. He defines his criteria or component-based approach to actorness thus:

> A componentry approach is one whereby an additional analytical tool may be grafted on a basic framework in order to allow more variegated analysis. The basic framework constitutes those characteristics necessary for actorness, regardless of the type of actor considered – in essence, it is the "generic code" by which an actor can be identified (Doidge 2008: 38).

Doidge outlines three characteristics of regional actorness: *action triggers* (the goals and interests of a particular organization), *policy processes/ structures* (the ability to take decisions relating to an action trigger) and *performance structures* (the structures and resources that are necessary to act once a decision has been taken). Doidge and Hettne offer interesting insights into the concept of regional actorness. However, Doidge downplays the importance of the ideational and normative aspects determining the nature of a regional actor, while Hettne pays not enough attention to the institutional dimension of actorness.

Bearing this in mind, we are now in a position to establish a framework for analyzing how regional organizations such as the EU and ASEAN can be international actors.

(1)   The EU and ASEAN are collective actors in international affairs whose members remain sovereign actors. ASEAN and the EU can be regarded as *regional communities* as outlined on Hettne's regioness scale. They are developing, as will be

elaborated on further below, their own collective identities in international affairs, they are participating as collective entities in international affairs, and they have developed unique institutional structures. However, they represent very different forms of regional integration. This is illustrated in the table below. And, as we will see, they have very different actor capabilities.

Table 1 about here

(2)   This brings us to different levels of regional actorness. For this the paper suggests using the following criteria:

(1) Internal Self-Understanding/ Self-image

(2) Recognition and Presence

(3) Institutionalization and Decision-Making Structures

These criteria allow us to analyze actorness in two regional settings such as the EU and ASEAN. Furthermore, they focus on the ideational side of actorness while also paying sufficient attention to issues surrounding institutionalization and decision-making structures.

ASEAN and the EU as Actors in World Affairs

Self-Understanding/ Self-Perception: EU and ASEAN Identity

Social constructivists have long stressed the importance of norms, ideas, values and identity formation in international affairs. Following a constructivist interpretation,

regions are social constructs that can be understood as a result of social interactions and ideational construction (see Katzenstein 2000 and Jayasuriya 1994: 12). Andrew Hurrell adds to this by using the concept 'regional community' to describe a process whereby the region emerges as an active subject with a distinct identity, actor capability, legitimacy and decision-making processes (1995: 466).

Identities are dynamic, context- and time-specific. They are multiple and overlapping. For example, political (national) identities can be distinguished from social and cultural identities, and address the relation between individuals and political entity (Fan 2008: 143). Can we distinguish between the national identities and the organizational identities in the EU and ASEAN? To do this, we need to look at the normative principles and core ideas that provide a referent for the self-perception or the 'mission statement' of the EU and ASEAN. I evoke here the concept 'meta-regime' used by Aggarwal and Chow (2010) to describe a system of norms and principles that determines the rules, procedures, actions and ultimately the self-understanding of an organization.

The organizational identities of the EU and ASEAN are defined by over-arching cultural properties (Lawson 2009: 304). The normative core of the EU has been influenced by the lessons learned from recent history such as the dangers of nationalism and intra-European warfare. The liberal foundations of the European project are reflected in the political culture of the EU based on democracy, some form of free trade, transnational cooperation, transnational law and institutions, and a respect for cosmopolitan human rights norms. This shared normative framework finds its expression in the *aquis communautaire* and in the admission of new member-

states. In 1993, at the Copenhagen European Council, the EU laid out the political and economic norms for the accession of new members. As Thomas Risse (2004: 33) highlighted, 'EU membership implies the voluntary acceptance of a particular order as legitimate and entails the recognition of a set of rules and obligations as binding'. This normative foundation is a significant component for the self-understanding and self-perception of the EU (Manners 2006: 81-82). The EU regards itself as a source of peace and stability for its member-states – a security community built on a strong supranational institutional and legal framework. This self-image permeates every aspect of the EU's external relations and has become part of the foreign policy identity of the EU (see Manners 2002, 2010, Manners and Whitman 2003).

A significant feature in the Southeast Asian context is the lack of a mature Westphalian state system. As such, well-established and entrenched national identities are conspicuous by their absence. Colonial powers introduced the Westphalian state system to the region, which indigenous elites put to effective use in their struggles against their colonizers and in their subsequent state-building efforts. Furthermore, given its recent colonial past, nationalism was far from discredited in the region; indeed, it has been the tool of choice in the state-building processes in Southeast Asia (Wunderlich 2007: 82). ASEAN was regarded by its member-states as a necessity to cement their independence and to enhance the legitimacy of the ruling regimes, whose survival in the face of ethnic and communist unrest was far from assured.[7] In Koro

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[7] The elites of all ASEAN members feared communist takeovers of their own or neighbouring countries (Jones 2010: 485).

Bessho's words 'ASEAN's purpose is to strengthen state sovereignty' (1999: 41).[8]

ASEAN emphasizes sovereignty and intergovernmental cooperation and rejects

supranationalism (Murray 2010: 599). Thus, ASEAN was designed to facilitate

Westphalia in the region in contrast to European integration, which aimed to

overcome the Westphalian system or at least curb the worst excesses of nationalism.[9]

ASEAN's normative foundations are enshrined in the so-called ASEAN Way, which

must be seen against the background of ASEAN's origins and its raison d'etre. The

ASEAN Way represents a web of norms into which ASEAN's members are sought to

be socialized (Jones 2010: 480), at the centre of which is a cluster of three normative

principles: the non-use of force in intra-regional disputes, non-interference and

regional autonomy (see Acharya 2001, 2009, Haacke 2003).[10]

Even today, more than 40 years after the Bangkok Declaration, sovereignty and non-

interference remain central to the self-image of ASEAN. Like the EU, ASEAN has

been active in promoting its norms and its model of regional cooperation. It has been

successful in 'socializing' China to participate in multilateral dialogues. For example,

ASEAN succeeded in discussing the South China Sea issue within the ASEAN

Regional Forum (ARF) although Beijing had previously rejected multilateral talks (To

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[8] Some have argued that this was also the case in Europe. European integration was a way of saving the European nation-state. Alan Milward's *European Rescue of the Nation-State* (2000) is probably the best example.

[9] For a detailed comparison of the historical evolution of EU and ASEAN regionalism see Wunderlich (2007).

[10] See also ASEAN (1967, 1976).

1999).[11] The ASEAN Way provides the foundation for several regional and interregional dialogue platforms such as the ARF, the ASEAN Plus Framework and the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (see Dosch 2004: 44).

The ASEAN Way also includes certain procedural norms. This includes a preference for consensus-based decision-making, informality and an aversion to formal and highly institutionalized forms of regional cooperation. In many ways, the ASEAN Way is the direct result of historical necessities and constructed difference with the EU's institutionalized regionalism (see Gilson 2005 and Lawson 2009).

The self-understanding of a regional organization has a significant impact on its institutional and decision-making structure. The norms and principles that determine the character of a regional actor are linked to the historical origins of the EU and ASEAN.

Recognition and Presence

External recognition and presence are closely related concepts. The external relations of the EU and ASEAN are a means for them to be recognized as actors in an international system.[12] Three forms of external relations of regional organizations may be discerned:

- Relations with third countries (bilateralism)

- Relations with other regional organizations (interregionalism)

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[11] See also Ba's excellent article on Sino-ASEAN relations (2006).

[12] On external perception of the EU see also Chaban and Holland (2008).

- Direct or indirect involvement in other transnational or global governance mechanisms (multilateralism).

The EU as well as ASEAN have created a web of bilateral contacts involving prospective members, neighboring countries and major powers in contemporary world politics including the US, Russia, Mexico, Canada, China, Japan, India and South Africa. These relations cut across many areas including trade, investments, security, the environment and human rights. The EU has a dedicated External Action Service and, since January 2010 the European Commission delegations have been renamed EU delegations and have been upgraded into embassy-type missions. ASEAN has eleven dialogue partners: Australia, Canada, China, European Union, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the Russian Federation, the United States and the United Nations. Both organisations have developed a network of relations with third countries but also with other regional and international organisations.

Interregionalism occupies a special position in the construction of regional actorness. It can be regarded as a series of processes whereby regional organizations recognize themselves and each other as actors. Indeed, regional organizations may derive part of their organizational identities through structured interaction with regional others (Gilson 2005: 310). The literature distinguishes between several types of interregionalism (see Hänggi 2000, 2006, Söderbaum et al. 2005 and Söderbaum 2011). Interregionalism is deeply rooted in the EU's external relations (Rigńer and Söderbaum 2010: 1) and is evident in the EU-ACP relations or in the ASEAN-EU dialogue. Other examples include the EU's relations with the Mediterranean and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). For the EU, interregionalism performs several

important functions. Not only is the EU promoting regional integration, it is also actively exporting its own norms and ideas. This is crucial for the self-image of the EU: the EU enhances its own actorness through the construction of regional others.

ASEAN as well is very active in intensifying its relations with other regional groupings. It has also been very successful in exporting its own norms into these groups. The ASEAN Way provides the foundation for the ARF, the APT, the ASEAN-EU relationship and the ASEM process.[13] The ASEAN-EU relationship, dating back to 1972, has developed into a political dialogue characterized by regular meetings centring on information exchange and cooperation in specific fields. It is based on a relatively low level of institutionalization, respecting the preferences of the ASEAN side, usually meetings at ministerial, ambassadorial and senior official levels, supplemented by expert working groups. This interregional relationship has been beneficial for both parties -- it has proved to be an important stepping-stone in EU and ASEAN identity construction processes (Gilson 2002) and has helped both regions to develop distinctive regional identities and status as collective international actors. [14] ASEAN also maintains cooperative links with other organisations such as the Economic Cooperation Organisation, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Rio Group, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, Mercosur and the South Pacific Forum.

In addition to its bilateral and interregional contacts the EU is also involved with the mechanisms of global governance. For example, the EU is a full member in its own

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[13] On regional identity and ASEM see also Reiterer (2009: 182-188).

[14] On ASEAN-EU relations see also Hwee (2008).

right of the World Trade Organization (WTO) as are its member-states. The EU is a major partner of the UN in development, environmental and aid issues but also in matters of security policy (Koutrakou 2011).[15] It has observer status in the UN, is a member of the Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) and has delegations in many countries around the world. ASEAN too has long-standing relations with the UN and its agencies. In 1977, the UNDP (United Nations Development Programme) was officially designated an ASEAN dialogue partner. The participation in it of the world's leading economic powers has been the principal conduit of development cooperation with ASEAN as a regional actor and since February 2000 ASEAN has been holding regular summit meetings with the UN.

It is evident from this brief survey that the external relations of the EU and ASEAN provide them with presence and recognition and, thereby, draw attention to the actorness of both organizations. In addition, with the Lisbon Treaty and the ASEAN Charter, the EU and ASEAN have been conferred a legal personality independent of their member-states, enhancing their standing and ability to participate in international affairs, further improving their recognition as actors.

Institutionalization and Decision-making Structures

Institutionalization is one of the central components of the actorness framework, constraining and shaping actorness. In order to emerge as international actors, regional projects need to be institutionalized in some form -- with formal and/or informal rules as well as behavioral norms and codes of conduct constituting

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[15] On EU-UN relations see also Smith (2006).

prescriptions and ordering repeated and interdependent relations. The original purpose of the EU, its 'mission statement', left it with a unique institutional structure including supranational features. However, these supranational features have been moderated by intergovernmental institutions and, as a result, the current organization of the EU represents a complicated compromise between state-centric and supranational ideas.

The EU's approach to institutionalization has been dominated by a preference for the formal and legal. Authority is transferred via complex treaties, establishing a framework that is legally binding for all signatories. Governance within the EU is divided between the so-called Community method and intergovernmental cooperation. Community policy-making refers to the competencies of the EC, encapsulated in the Common Commercial Policy (CCP) and other parts of the Treaty of Rome dealing with the negotiation and conclusion of international agreements. Community competence is expressed through the dominance of the European Commission in policy- and decision-making processes (Smith, 1996: 257). Union policy-making, on the other hand, consists of the extensive coordination of national policies among member-states (Smith, 1996: 258). European Political Cooperation (EPC) and its successor the CFSP and ESDP, are two examples. Due to the idiosyncrasies of the EU, its external activities are divided between external economic and foreign policies, with the Community method dominating the former and Union policy-making being a feature of the latter. Furthermore, EU member-states remain sovereign actors and have the right to pursue their own foreign policy goals. This causes, among other things, representation issues between the EU and its member-states in international organizations.[16]

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[16] For the external relations of the EU see also Dony (2009).

Decision-making procedures within the EU vary significantly. Depending on the policy area they range from qualified majority voting to unanimity. Unanimity procedures are arduous and time consuming (Lister 1984: 11-14). In the 2003 Iraq crisis, for instance, the EU failed to put forward a common foreign policy position due to the diverging opinions and interests of EU member-states. In order to enhance the EU as a foreign policy actor, the Lisbon Treaty has extended the use of qualified majority voting in the Council to new areas. It created a new European External Action service and the positions of a President of the Council and a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy.

ASEAN has developed its own approach to regional integration, which has been described as a 'relations-based approach' (Davidson 2009: 28). ASEAN decision-making structures are purely intergovernmental. The so-called track-one activities refer to official diplomacy between government representatives (Morrison 2004). ASEAN diplomacy makes use of informal and non-official relationships and discussions to work out consensual positions behind the scenes, rather than employing lengthy intergovernmental conferences. This has helped to 'create regional policy networks comprised of officials and experts who seal their relationships on the golf course' (Bellamy 2004: 170). In addition, ASEAN makes intensive use of 'track-two diplomacy' (Capie 2010) referring to an 'unofficial, yet officially acknowledged and employed level of meeting, often within institutionalized settings' (Freistein 2008: 224). ASEAN's institutional structure and its decision-making is, therefore, characterized by a strict avoidance of the pooling of sovereignty and a preference for informal institutionalization.

ASEAN's procedural norms are convention, voluntarism and informal agreement in contrast to the formal legalism of the EU. This is encapsulated in the concepts of *musyawarah* (consultation) and *mufakat* (consensus) (Nischalke 2002: 93). The consensus model has often been regarded as the center-piece of ASEAN governance. It is a process leading to collective action ensuring that 'each and every action taken in the name of ASEAN must either contribute to or be neutral, but not detract from, the perceived national interests of individual ASEAN member states (Kurus 1994: 405). The consensus procedure does not imply unanimity. Decisions might be easier to reach by the use of qualified majority voting, but decisions made by unanimity are easier to implement. Consensus aims to strike a balance between 'the probability of reaching a decision and the likelihood of compliance' (Rittberger and Zangl 2006: 68). A consensus is reached when no member state explicitly objects. This allows every member-state the ability to block decisions that are contrary to their interests.

The difficulties in arriving at a consensual position were evident in ASEAN's response to Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia in 1979, an episode that was crucial for the evolution of ASEAN as a regional collective actor. Reactions to Vietnam's invasion differed between ASEAN members. Thailand was extremely concerned about Vietnam's dominant position in Indochina (Alagappa 1993, Chanda 1980) whereas Indonesia was more worried about China. Consensus was forced by troubles on the Thai-Vietnamese border in 1980, resulting in a unitary ASEAN approach (ASEAN 1980). ASEAN rallied and combined a variety of instruments in order to assert its voice on the international stage. ASEAN took its defense of sovereignty and

non-intervention to the UN (Snitwongse 1998), and UN resolution 34/22 called for an immediate withdrawal of all Vietnamese forces from Cambodia (Antolik 1990).

Low-key institutionalization sets clear limits for potential regional actorness. ASEAN's model of informal regionalism has left the Association unable to address several transnational challenges of the 1990s such as the Asian financial crisis and the haze of 1997, the East Timor crisis, the increased threat of terrorism after the 9/11 attacks in the United States, the spread of infectious diseases (such as SARS and avian flu), piracy and transnational crime, and illegal migration. While ASEAN was not designed to deal with such crises it was generally felt that ASEAN had somehow failed to respond efficiently and that 'something needed to be done'. This capability-expectations gap is in itself a good indicator of the recognition ASEAN has achieved as an international actor and has led to a serious rethinking of the modus operandi of the organization. Core ASEAN procedural norms are being challenged (Hwee 2008: 92), and the EU model of institutionalized regionalism is becoming a subject of study. As Yeo Lay Hwee points out 'the discourse coming from ASEAN has been moving towards the need to build institutions and there are more serious attempts and studies to understand how the EU works' (2008: 92). The outcome has been the ASEAN Charter, which almost mimics EU-style institutionalization. With it, ASEAN has imported whole parts of the EU structure. The 14th ASEAN Summit in 2009 agreed on a roadmap to create a three-pillar structure comprised of an ASEAN Community, based on a single market, an ASEAN Political-Security Community and an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASEAN 2008, 2009). This can be interpreted as an indicator of the EU's success as a model for regional actorness (not to be confused with regional integration). After more than forty years, ASEAN is being transformed

into a rule-based community endowed with a legal personality. The ASEAN Summit structure and the Chairmanship are very similar to the European Council and the Presidency. In short the ASEAN Charter 'heavily emulates EU concepts and terminology and represents what could have been a lean version of the Constitutional Treaty' (Börzel and Risse 2009: 13). ASEAN's external competences differ significantly from the EU's and it is still avoiding supranational institutions but it appears to be going beyond informal institutionalization toward a more rule-based approach.[17]

Conclusion

This article has presented an overview of the development of our understanding of regional actorness and the most relevant contributions to that topic arising from social constructivism, new regionalism and European Studies. Combining Hettne's emphasis on identity and Doidge's stress on institutionalization, the article has proposed a framework for the assessment and comparison of regional actors. The elements of this framework are self-image/ recognition and presence/ institutionalization and decision-making structures.

Applying this framework to a comparison between the EU and ASEAN, the article challenges perceptions of the EU's uniqueness as an international actor. ASEAN too is increasingly behaving as an international actor and being recognized as such. The capability-expectations driving the development of EU actor capabilities over the last twenty years can be observed in the ASEAN case as well. It is an indicator for

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[17] See also Davidson's (2009: 229).

external recognition exceeding actual capabilities. Regional actorness is therefore, at least to a large extent, driven by the perceived need to respond to crises.

There is no particular blueprint for the normative core or the institutional design of a regional organization. Indeed, if anything, the comparison has highlighted that historical context and normative priorities determine internal identity and institutional structure. European integration required the pooling of sovereignty between well-institutionalized, well-developed and well-established nation-states and as a result, the European project favored a highly institutionalized structure characterized by legally enforceable rules (Söderbaum and Sbragia 2010). ASEAN member-states, on the other hand, can be characterized as developmental states in political and economic terms, and this goes a long way toward explaining ASEAN's version of institutionalization and its avoidance of supranationality.[18] Regional actorness is, therefore, dependent on the socio-historical background processes of regional integration. These processes determine the normative core from which the meta-regime and with it the self-understanding of an actor is constructed. It also shapes institutionalization and decision-making structures. It is important to note that informal institutionalization sets clear limits to regional actorness as it determines external competencies, representation and capabilities. Moving from informal to more formal institutionalization may enhance regional actorness. ASEAN appears to emulate lessons learned from the EU's example in order to enhance its own actorness and to be able to overcome the capability-expectations gap. However, changing

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[18] An anonymous reviewer also pointed out that ASEAN's newly independent members may have lacked the institutional capabilities to follow the legalistic integration system of the EC.

institutionalization must be accompanied by changes to the ASEAN Way to avoid a mere 'window-dressing exercise'.

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	Type of Region	Characteristics	Type of Regional Integration
ASEAN	Regional Community	A regional society which has developed its own collective identity, its own ability to act in international affairs and which is recognised as a collective actor	Informal/ voluntary political integration, beginnings of economic integration
EU	Regional Community		Formally institutionalised political integration, internal market

Table 1: ASEAN and the EU as Regions According to Hettne's Regioness Scale[19]

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[19] Adopted from Hettne and Söderbaum (2002).