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From left to right: Prof. Carlo Secchi, Bocconi University, Milan, Mr. Apinan Pavanarit, Director - General, European Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Bangkok, Prof. Chia Siow Yue, Director of Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, Singapore, Dr. Narongchai Akrasanee, Seranee Co. Ltd, Bangkok, Prof. Rolf Langhammer, Kiel Institute of World Economics, Germany

Picture taken from the International Conference "Asia - Europe on the Eve of the 21st Century", 19 - 20 August 1999.

Remark on "Asia-Europe on the Eve of the 21st Century" Mr. Apinan Pavanarit**

It is always difficult to be a panelist on the last session of an intensive international conference on a Friday afternoon. It is equally, difficult, although indeed a privilege, to be in the presence of a group of distinguished speakers all of whom can lend their extensive wisdom on the future of Asia-Europe relations.

To say that the subject of Asia-Europe cooperation on the eve of the 21st century is wide-ranging in scope is an understatement. The historical roots of the relationship between the two regions are deep; the spheres of interaction between Asia and Europe are numerous; and the issues which face both Asians and Europeans, now and in the future, are multi-dimensional in nature and highly fluid. What, therefore, can we expect from the relationship between Asia and Europe in this coming millennium?

Let us look at where Asia and Europe will be in the next five to ten years. I am an optimist. Both regions will emerge as key players at the global level. Barring a major collapse in the international financial system or a major financial crisis in China, Japan or the United States, Asia should be well into the post-crisis era, characterised by lower but sustainable economic growth powered by restructured but more competitive economies.

* Remark by Mr. Apinan Pavanarit for an International Conference on "Asia-Europe on the Eve of the 21st Century" held by Chulalongkorn University European Studies Programme, 19-20 August, 1999, Saranites Room, Main Auditorium, Chulalongkorn University.

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Furthermore, with other developments such as the partial institutionalisation of the dialogue between ASEAN and the three Northeast Asian countries, namely, China, Japan and the Republic of Korea (or what is called the 10+3), during the annual ASEAN Summits, a large part of Asia should experience greater intra-regional consultations on political issues leading to a more consolidated "Asian" position in world affairs.

There may even be a greater sense of an "Asian" identity, although this is still admittedly an amorphous and potentially controversial concept. The crux of the problem is that Asians have not yet identified themselves strongly as part of a region. Moreover, the definition of Asia itself is subject to much debate—whether it should include important sub-regions such as the Indian subcontinent and Oceania.

Likewise assuming that there will be no reversals in the movements towards greater economic and financial integration in the European Union, anchored by the EURO- II, and an enhanced Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), the European Union should consolidate its position as a "prime mover" in global economic and political affairs. The eastward expansion of the EU (preceded already by the more sensitive eastward expansion of NATO) should help contribute towards a more stable and prosperous regional order in Europe.

But Europe is not the EU and vice versa. Russia, a country with most of its territory on the Asian continent but with an orientation that is directed more towards its west, will continue to be a major player in Europe. As we speak, a trend towards greater coalescence amongst Russia and some of its CIS partners is emerging. Should the EU and NATO continue to treat Russia as a distant cousin, Russia may seek to develop a new *modus vivendi* in the area occupied by many of the CIS republics and possibly part

of Eastern Europe as a security guarantee and a zone to advance mutual economic and cultural interests. Turkey may also wish to enhance its ties with the Central Asian Republics particularly as it continues to be snubbed by the EU. The Europe of the future may thus see three co-existing zones of interaction with the EU being the primary driver of events, Russia and other CIS countries converging as a defense mechanism to EU enlargement, and Turkey and the Asian Republics developing new relationships based on ethnic/religious ties.

It is with these possible future scenarios in mind that Asia and Europe will develop simultaneously into both key partners and potential competitors in the 21st century.

There are still strong complementarities and potential for synergistic relations between the two regions particularly along the economic front. Asia will remain an important market for Europe while European investment, expertise, technology and market access will still be important for Asia. Closer cooperation between the two regions on important trade and investment issues can pay mutually beneficial dividends in fora such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and in the so-called Millennium Round of Multilateral Trade Negotiations (MTN), should such a round be initiated. Although there are indeed divergent economic and commercial interests within both Asia and Europe, convergent positions on even some issues would greatly enhance the bargaining power of the two regions. In the long run, with greater economic dynamism in the two regions, both Asia and Europe can expand their programmes of cooperation in third regions and help contribute to the global economic and financial architecture.

Similar cooperation can also be cemented in the political sphere. One of the dangers facing the world of the 21st century is unilateralism. In the future, as in the past, the anchor for

international peace and security should be the United Nations and more specifically the UN Security Council-until the international community as a group decides otherwise. It is in the interests of both Europe and Asia, both of which are just beginning to exercise their respective political strengths in the global arena, to ensure that multilateralism remains the primary driving force in the global security system and the only accepted modality of maintaining international peace and security. Inter-regional cooperation on political issues, reinforced through frank and mutually respectful political dialogue at all levels, is thus an important ingredient of multilateralism.

But it is also inevitable that two influential regions such as Asia and Europe will find themselves as competitors on many important issues. Key actors in each region see inter-regional linkages as part of their respective grand design to create their own security guarantees, enhance their economic competitiveness and strengthen their cultural identities. The EU, as the core group within Europe, sees its relationship with Asia as only one of many inter-regional linkages it is promoting which include the trans-Atlantic partnership, the free trade agreements with MERCOSUR and similar arrangements with the Mediterranean states. ASEAN countries, including Thailand, see the relationship with Europe as a complement to its relationships with other regional powers through the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) for example.

Although Asian and European countries hold a diversity of views on sector-specific issues, one issue which will continue to be a source of contention between many Asian countries and the EU is the latter's Common Agricultural Policy (CAP) which, in simplest terms, distorts the prices for agricultural products within the EU and in world markets, and thus hampers trade in this sector. The linking of trade to non-trade issues such as labour, human

rights, environment and corruption will continue to be a source of contention between the EU and many Asian countries.

What mechanisms do we have to sustain Asia-Europe cooperation in the 21st century and beyond? Until the sovereign state of the Westphalian legal order disappears, bilateral relations will continue to be an important means to advance cooperation between individual countries in the two regions. But although the benefits (and disadvantages) of cooperation are most directly felt in a bilateral relationship, there are limits as to what states, particularly small states, can accomplish by themselves. Furthermore, in an increasingly interdependent world, the nature of the challenges facing countries are such that cooperation amongst a broad front of states are required to ensure effective action and meaningful results. Inter-regional cooperation thus becomes an important mechanism to advance the mutual interests of individual countries in both Asia and Europe.

There are several frameworks of relations linking Asia and Europe. These include the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), the ASEAN-EU Dialogue, the ASEAN-Russia Dialogue and the ARF. I shall focus on the first two of these mechanisms for inter-regional relations.

Within a very short space of time, the ASEM has become one of the key mechanisms advancing cooperation between many countries in both Asia and Europe. A number of important concrete activities have emanated from this initiative, many of them from Thailand as host country of ASEM I and as one of the ASEM coordinators from the Asian side. The challenge facing ASEM is to combat the rising trend of disinterest and declining enthusiasm at the political level, brought about in part by the Asian economic and financial crisis and the European pre-occupations with deepening its financial and economic integration. The goal is to use the

Leaders' Meeting at the ASEM 3, to be held in Seoul in October 2000, to re-invigorate the Asia-Europe partnership with a concrete action plan which will advance cooperation between the two regions in the next millennium.

But ASEM will have to seriously consider becoming more than just a consultative forum. On the Asian side, serious consideration must be given to using the ASEM to promote closer coordination and cooperation amongst the Asian Partners. This is one mean to strengthen Asian cohesiveness which will have positive consequences for individual Asian countries far beyond ASEM itself and complement efforts in other fora (ASEAN + 3 Summit Meetings) to build an Asian esprit de corps.

Secondly, ASEM must be able to translate the concrete gains made at the projects level into strong political commitments to sustain the partnership at the highest level. 'The incredible proliferation of activities, from 17 during ASEM I in 1996 to over 50 this year, has built important networks of relationships across different sectors of society. At the same time, however, ASEM should not be a routine exercise undertaken only by officials and experts, but an evolving partnership which attracts the constant attention of Leaders and political decision-makers at the highest levels, and representatives of civil society across a broad range of areas.

Thirdly, ASEM must be confident enough to begin to engage in building consensus on important and substantive issues even though the decision-making on such issues may be taken in other fora, whether they be the WTO or the UN. An ASEM coalition in important fora, even if it relates to smaller issues, will enhance the credibility of the ASEM process. Thus, although ASEM will not be directly involved in negotiations on trade or

political issues, it can help coordinate views and positions on these issues which may be used in other fora.

Fourthly, ASEM should have a serious examination of the benefits and drawbacks of institutionalisation of the ASEM process. Although the subject may be taboo at the present juncture, institutionalisation may be unavoidable in the long-run if ASEM is to manage the vast myriad of significant and concrete activities at all levels and in all areas befitting a comprehensive partnership. Institutionalisation in the ASEM context involves not only the possible establishment of a lean but effective Secretariat to help manage the ASEM process-it also involves vesting substantial decision-making authority to the three existing Ministerial Meetings (Foreign, Economic and Finance) which meet every two years as well as to the Science and Technology Ministers' Conference (STMC) which will be held in Beijing this October.

The ASEAN-EU Dialogue will need some time to overcome the political obstacles which has thus far prevented it from being implemented at all levels. This bloc-to-bloc relationship, which is the longest-standing relationship between ASEAN and a Dialogue Partner, was envisaged as being one of the core relationships between Asia and Europe. Revitalising the ASEAN-EU Dialogue, particularly at the Ministerial level, will be one of the important tasks for ASEAN and the EU in the months and years ahead.

In conclusion, the potential for a vibrant partnership between Asia and Europe through various inter-regional mechanisms or bilateral relationships remains strong. Asia and Europe can work together for their own mutual benefit as well as to shape the emerging international economic and political landscape. But Asia and Europe will also have to manage the

competition between them so that it remains healthy and takes place within an agreed upon framework. The mechanisms to take forward this relationship, whether it be the ASEM, the ASEAN-EU Dialogue, the ASEAN-Russia Dialogue and the ARF, must continue to be nurtured, placed under constant review and modified as necessary so that the relationship between Asia and Europe in the next millennium are able to meet effectively both existing and emerging challenges.

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