

Exploring the Dynamics in the EU-Association of Southeast Asia Nations Interregional Relationship, 2012-2017

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Abstract : The EU-ASEAN relations which can be dated back to 1972 represents one of the oldest group-to-group relationship in international politics. Despite a longstanding dialogue partnership, the EU and ASEAN have long been reluctant to forge deeper and substantial cooperation in political and security domains. However, the year of 2012 witnessed a salient shift in EU-ASEAN relations, with the EU significantly elevating ASEAN's profile in its external relations. Given the limited scholarly attention that has been devoted to this change in ASEAN-EU relations, this article explores why there has been a greater level of engagement and approximation between the EU and ASEAN. In particular, it asks why the EU, which had long been reluctant to recognize ASEAN as a strategic partner, has changed its policy towards ASEAN. Drawing on social constructivism, this article argues that the EU's and ASEAN's evolving identity-formation processes have played a significant role in reshaping their mutual perceptions, which subsequently leads to the modification of the interregional policies of both actors. The methodology of this study is based on content analysis of a wide range of official documents and policy papers from the EU and ASEAN, as well as more than 20 in-depth elite interviews with diplomats and experts working on the EU-ASEAN relationship from both organisations. Departing from the existing works which mainly adopt a Eurocentric perspective when analysing the EU-ASEAN interregionalism, this study suggests that the approximation of the EU-ASEAN relationship between 2012 and 2017 is driven by both actors' adjustment of international identities, together with the internal dynamics and systematic changes within both regions.

Keywords : Association of Southeast Asia Nations, European Union, EU foreign policy, interregionalism

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