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## Book Reviews

Novotny, Daniel, and Clara Portela (eds) (2012), *EU–ASEAN Relations in the 21st Century. Strategic Partnership in the Making* Houndmills, Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, ISBN 978-1-137-00749-0, 216 pages

There is no shortage of recent publications on EU–ASEAN relations. Given the organisations’ status as the two most advanced regional integration schemes (with the EU leading ASEAN by a significant margin though) there is an obvious case for comparison. Furthermore, relations between the two entities have firmly established themselves as the prime empirical example in the academic inter-regionalism discourse which emerged around the mid-1990s. This book is a welcome contribution to the study of EU–ASEAN relations for two reasons: First, it goes beyond inter-regionalism as a rather tight analytical framework that has neither developed nor evolved markedly in recent years and thus tends to limit the scope of investigation. Second, the authors add some innovative and original aspects to the debate, including Naila Maier-Knapp’s chapter on “the EU and Non-Traditional Security in Southeast Asia” which explains the specific role of the EU, or more precisely EU actorness, in contributing to ASEAN’s regional governance agenda in economic, environmental and health-related fields.

In a similar vein, the four chapters of Part IV (“EU–ASEAN: Practitioners’ View”) provide some valuable insights by former ASEAN secretary general Ong Keng Yong, European Commission official Jan Willem Blankert and others into the reality of the relationship beyond the bloomy rhetoric of official diplomacy. Here, the reader catches a rare glimpse of the important dimension of EU–ASEAN development cooperation and, within this context, EU technical assistance to ASEAN, which has been instrumental in deepening regional cooperation in Southeast Asia. This aspect is usually neglected in publications on EU–ASEAN relations. Furthermore, Natalia Chaban et al.’s chapter on “The EU in Southeast Asian Public Opinion: Public Diplomacy Case” opens the door to the under-researched area of Southeast Asian perceptions of Europe and related issues – despite some methodological issues related to the way survey data was used and is presented. It is with regard to the aforementioned examples that the book fulfils its promise to explore “the long-neglected EU–ASEAN political relationship” (p. 1).

However, many chapters elaborate either on the EU or ASEAN or refer to specific experiences of both organisations in the fields of law, human rights, democratisation or energy security, but fail to provide any deeper

analysis of how the EU and ASEAN have interacted on these issues. Hints at the existence of cooperation or at least a mutual interest in intensifying collaboration are plentiful but remain vague, as seen here for example: “Given the commitment of both EU and ASEAN to human rights principles, we would suggest that the EU offers a useful precedent towards integrated, legally binding human rights rules and institutions” (pp. 117–118). The lack of elaboration and empirically innovative findings is particularly disappointing in instances when oft-made arguments are reiterated but not substantiated, such as on EU democracy promotion: “At the level of inter-regional, EU–ASEAN relations, democratization issues have also played an influential role” (p. 12). The role of Sweden is cursorily mentioned but a more detailed investigation would have added real value to the debate. Overall, the book broadens the perspective on EU–ASEAN relations but does not fully live up to its basic premise. Is there a “strategic partnership in the making” as the book’s subtitle suggests? Many questions remain unanswered.

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