

# Mutual perceptions of Asia and the EU/Europe

## Media, elite and public opinion in Singapore and Germany

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### ABSTRACT

In an increasingly interlinked and interdependent world, Europe and Asia are key players. Free trade agreements (FTAs), such as the ones the EU concluded with South Korea and Singapore, are indicative of strong mutual economic interests. It is therefore timely to take a closer look at the mutual perceptions of Asians and Europeans – not only at the governmental and policymaking levels, but also in terms of public opinion and the media.

Drawing on data from an extensive research project led by the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), New Zealand, the empirical study in this paper assesses the mutual perceptions of the EU/Europe and Asia, and their respective actors, focusing on two countries – Germany and Singapore. It seeks to do so through an analysis of the data collected from print and broadcast media, interviews with media practitioners, and the findings from public opinion surveys.

### Keywords

Asia; Europe; EU; perceptions

*The EU Centre in Singapore is a partnership of*

# Mirror perceptions of Asia and the EU/Europe: Media, elite and public opinion in Singapore and Germany

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## Introduction

In an increasingly interlinked and interdependent world, Europe and Asia are key players. Free trade agreements (FTAs), such as the ones the EU concluded with South Korea and Singapore, are indicative of strong mutual economic interests.<sup>2</sup> In the context of international relations, there has been a recent surge of meetings between leaders of European institutions and member states and their Asian counterparts.<sup>3</sup> It has even been suggested that China might become a major investor in a euro zone struggling with sovereign debt crises.<sup>4</sup> It is therefore timely to take a closer look at the mutual perceptions of Asians and Europeans – not only at the governmental and policymaking levels, but also in terms of public opinion and the media.

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<sup>2</sup> European Commission, Enterprise and Industry (website) *International Affairs – Free Trade Agreements*, available online at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/facilitating-trade/free-trade/index\\_en.htm](http://ec.europa.eu/enterprise/policies/international/facilitating-trade/free-trade/index_en.htm)

<sup>3</sup> See for instance: European Commission (2012) 'High Representative Catherine Ashton travels to Asia', Press Release, 8 July 2012, available online at:

<http://europa.eu/rapid/pressReleasesAction.do?reference=P/12/757&type=HTML>

<sup>4</sup> Herwartz, Christoph (2012) 'Merkel will an Chinas Geld' [Merkel wants China's money] [in German], *n-tv*, 28 August 2012, available online at:

<http://www.n-tv.de/wirtschaft/Merkel-will-an-Chinas-Geld-article7077336.html>

In 2003, a research project on the external perceptions of the European Union (EU) in Asian and Asia-Pacific countries, led by the National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE), New Zealand, started and has led to a series of studies and publications. This 'EU through the Eyes of Asia' project spawned the mirror project 'Asia in the Eyes of Europe' in 2011. With these two sets of data providing a wealth of insights into the mutual perceptions of the two world regions, the empirical study in this paper will assess the mutual perceptions of the EU/Europe and Asia, and their respective actors, focusing in particular on two countries – Germany and Singapore. It seeks to do so through an analysis of the data collected from print and broadcast media, interviews with representatives from the media elite, and the findings from public opinion surveys.

At first sight, comparing these two countries that differ so significantly in terms of size, population, history, and culture might seem to be an arbitrary exercise. With a little over 1% of the world's population, Germany is the fifth largest economy in the world, and the economic 'powerhouse' of the European project. Singapore is a city-state in the heart of Asia which, despite its size, holds the fifth position in the ranking of countries according to GDP per capita.<sup>5</sup> But these countries are not chosen because they are held to be representative of their respective regions. Rather, they are chosen more as 'snapshots' from a comprehensive set of data to yield more focused analysis.

The paper will begin with the media analysis, comparing the very low coverage of Asia in Germany with the reportage of the EU/Europe in Singapore. To give these figures some context, the opinions of the 'media elites' are taken into consideration – that is, the people whose attitudes and practices shape the media content, directly or indirectly. Finally, the paper compares and contrasts this data with public opinion survey results, to give a sense of public perceptions of the respective 'other', having been exposed to the media outlets already mentioned. The paper also assesses how the survey results concur or differ from the image of 'the Other', as gleaned from the other parts of the study. The conclusion will suggest further possibilities for research.

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<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), 'The World Factbook - Singapore', available online at:

<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/>

## Historical background

Bersick and others observed that 'Historically, self-definition of Europe [...] rests on thinking about and perceiving Asia'.<sup>6</sup> The territorial concept of Asia goes back to the ancient Greeks, to geographers such as Anaximander and Hecataeus who divided the known world into the three regions of Europe, Asia and Libya (the then-known part of Africa). Very much later, during Europe's Middle Ages, Europeans started to use the concept of Asia as an antithesis to the rising consciousness of a territorial entity of Europe.<sup>7</sup> Ever since ancient times however, the limits of Europe and its border with Asia have been fuzzy and contested. Even if we challenge the classical 'mosaic vision of a world' divided into states or continents<sup>8</sup> and take into account that networks of regionalisation are increasingly important, one still finds outlined in a European Commission's substantive report that 'Europe does not exist without non-Europe' and 'Europe can only be realised in the mirror of Others'.<sup>9</sup> This idea of 'otherness' and opposition is usually considered to have found its origins in the dichotomy between East and West in Herodotus' (484 to 425 B.C.) *Histories*.<sup>10</sup>

If we accept that central to our identities are images of 'the Other', and if we take into account the longstanding and, arguably, misconstrued<sup>11</sup> antithesis of Asia versus Europe, we find it all the more pertinent to test these old hypotheses. In a multi-polar, regionalised and globalised reality, how do old categories translate into modern day thought? Projections by their very nature say at least as much about their producer as about the targets they

<sup>6</sup> Bersick, Sebastian, Michael Bruter, Natalia Chaban, Sol Iglesias, Ronan Lenihan (2012) *Asia in the Eyes of Europe* (Baden-Baden: Nomos), p. 8.

<sup>7</sup> Grataloup, Christian (2011) 'Europe Seen From Here and Elsewhere,' EuroBroadMap International Conference, Rouen, France, December 1-2, 2011, available online at:

<http://eurobroadmap.sciencesconf.org/?lang=en>

<sup>8</sup> Taylor, P.J. (2001) 'Being Economical with the Geography', *Environment and Planning A* 33:6, pp. 949 – 954.

<sup>9</sup> European Commission (2002) 'Colloque « Dialogue interculturel », Commission européenne, DG EAC « Action Jean Monnet », Bruxelles 20-21 Mars 2002 - Notes de cadrage' [in French], available online at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/jm/more/co\\_nfdial02/notes\\_cadrage.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/jm/more/co_nfdial02/notes_cadrage.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> Kopf, David (1986) 'A Macrohistoriographical essay on the idea of East and West from Herodotus to Edward Said', *Comparative Civilizations Review*, No. 15.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.* pp. 23ff

construct; they might however also affect the observed 'Other' who might then incorporate or even appropriate some of the 'xenostereotypes' into their self-identification.<sup>12</sup> This thought ties in with Edward Said's ideas of Orientalism, hypothesising that images of Europe and images of 'Others' intersect, overlap and reinforce one another. In this spirit, we compare Asian and European perceptions of one another and try to establish in how far common awareness, mutual visibility, stereotypical images exist on either of the Eurasian sides of the 'super continent'.

## Methodology and some caveats

The data used in this paper is drawn from the 'EU through the Eyes of Asia' project of 2011-12 (*henceforth EUiA*) and the mirror 'Asia in the Eyes of Europe' project (*henceforth ASiE*) of 2011-12. For the former, the data from the first 'EU through the Eyes of Asia' research initiative of 2006-7 is supplemented here for comparative discussions.

The methodology for both studies has been largely the same, although their aims and objectives have differed somewhat. The original EUiA study aimed to inform about 'the global importance of the EU and how this is being interpreted outside of Europe'.<sup>13</sup> It was undertaken in order to 'help to develop a wider knowledge about the international perceptions of the EU: the external image of the EU [constituting] a fundamental component of an ongoing process of EU identity [...]', to 'assist informed policy' and suggest recommendations to 'the EU, third countries and the media, contributing to more effective public diplomacy'.<sup>14</sup> The ASiE study 'analyses contemporary European perceptions of Asia [...] to know if and how the understanding of Asia in Europe goes beyond a traditional geographic definition of the region but also reflects contemporary regional political, economic, security, social, human and cultural dynamics within

<sup>12</sup> European Commission (2002) 'Colloque « Dialogue interculturel », Commission européenne, DG EAC « Action Jean Monnet », Bruxelles 20-21 Mars 2002 - Notes de cadrage' [in French], available online at:

[http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/jm/more/co\\_nfdial02/notes\\_cadrage.pdf](http://ec.europa.eu/education/programmes/llp/jm/more/co_nfdial02/notes_cadrage.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Holland, Martin, Peter Ryan, Alojzy Nowak and Natalia Chaban (2007) 'Introduction: The EU thought the Eyes of Asia', in Holland, Martin, Peter Ryan, Alojzy Nowak and Natalia Chaban (eds) *The EU thought the Eyes of Asia* (Singapore/Warsaw: University of Warsaw), p. 25.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 28

what has been called “a true pan-regional Asian system” of international relations’.<sup>15</sup> These two approaches differ in the sense that for the data collected from Asia, the methodology is geared towards assessing the success and relevance of the institutionalised regional integration project that is the EU, whereas the data collected from Europe look to assess whether any sense of an Asian regional identity or ‘system’ is being perceived at all by Europeans, among all other impressions of Asia.

The limitations which are inherent in the different search terms are indicative of the different degrees of regional integration present. One can therefore regard both data sets as somewhat eurocentric – the ‘mirror study’ cannot really serve as such, as there is no regional entity to which the EU can be meaningfully compared. We certainly do not disregard the existence of ASEAN, but the premises and executions of both initiatives are vastly different. Therefore we can only look at aspects of the two studies selectively, and make comparisons with qualifications and caveats.

The overall research design consisted of three phases undertaken in each of the chosen research locations. Firstly, images and representations of the EU and Asia and their respective or mutual actors in print and television media are explored, secondly a series of elite interviews was conducted and thirdly a public opinion survey is carried out. In the case of the Asian data, we have interviews with political, economic and media elites; in the case of EU data the third stage was limited to media elites only.

As noted by the project organisers, ‘the project methodology involves [collecting] quantitative and qualitative measures, and it is the combination of these two that provides a particular sophistication to the analysis’.<sup>16</sup> In the context of media analysis, the determination of both the focus of domesticity and the degree of centrality of each news item aims at analysing the intensity of news representation and geopolitical placement of the respective actors’

<sup>15</sup> Shambaugh, David (2008) ‘International Relations in Asia: The Two-Level Game,’ in Shambaugh, David and Michael Yahuda (eds) *International Relations of Asia* (Lanham: Rowman & Littlefield), p. 4 [in-text quotation by Bersick et al, p. 8]. One might point out though that Shambaugh qualifies his statement by further noting in parenthesis - ‘at least at the sub-state level’.

<sup>16</sup> Holland et al, p. 33

actions.<sup>17</sup> As already mentioned, there is a significant gap in the data available, arising from the fact the two studies treat the search terms ‘EU’ and ‘Asia’ as parallels. This might be legitimate in isolation, but it would amount to a categorical error if one attempts to relate the two data sets meaningfully. Quantitatively, one can fill in gaps in the data by carrying out additional searches in the newspaper archives using the more appropriate search term ‘Europe’ instead of ‘EU’. Although it was not possible to address this additional research task within the scope of this paper, this identifies an opportunity for further research in this context.

The earlier EUiA study ‘assumed that newspapers are still a major source, indeed *the* major source for forming political ideas and information, in the regions we have examined. It [could] be debated whether the internet will usurp this eventually, requiring a different methodology in a few years’ time [...]’.<sup>18</sup> Given that this present paper comes six years after the publication of the first volume of EUiA, and almost a decade after the beginnings of the entire project, we will have to justify sticking to the same methodology in a fast-changing and technologically evolving world. It is undeniable that new and social media have been dramatically on the rise in the past few years, in the news sector. In 2010, just before the data collection for this paper started, 82% of Singaporean households had internet access<sup>19</sup> with a penetration of 77.2% of the population according to ITU.<sup>20</sup> A new study of 2012 has found a penetration of 54.9% for Facebook alone.<sup>21</sup> Similar numbers can be found in Germany, with 79.1% of the population having internet access in 2010.<sup>22</sup>

<sup>17</sup> This methodology follows that of the 1985 UNESCO comparative media study of Sreberny-Mohammadi, Annabelle, Kaarle Nordentreg, Robert Stevenson and Frank Ugboajah (eds) (1985) *Foreign News in Media: International Reporting in 29 Countries* (Paris: UNESCO).

<sup>18</sup> Holland et al, p. 25.

<sup>19</sup> Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), ‘Infocomm Usage - Households and Individuals’, available online at:

<http://www.ida.gov.sg/Publications/20070822125451.aspx>

<sup>20</sup> International Telecommunication Union, available online at: <http://www.itu.int/en/Pages/default.aspx>

<sup>21</sup> Internet World Stats, ‘Asia: Asia Marketing Research, Internet Usage, Population Statistics and Facebook Information’, available online at:

<http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia.htm>

<sup>22</sup> Marketresearch.com, ‘Germany Internet Market Statistics, 2001-2010’, available online at:

Therefore, in any piece of research based on findings from traditional print and broadcast media, some considerations will have to be given regarding the effect of new/social media and internet news providers. If we consider however that we are looking at perceptions and knowledge about the European and Asian institutions and associations, political formations and regional entities, we will have to wonder if that knowledge and those kind of news really might come instead increasingly from within the context of new media. In 2006, 17.8% of the respondents claimed that their preferred choice of getting news on the EU was the internet.<sup>23</sup> This number would of course have risen in recent years, given the steadily increasing internet penetration of households.<sup>24</sup> What we find however is that if people get their news online, they mostly use websites and online versions of the existing print media. For example the increasing use of mobile devices to access traditional print media is attested for example by a German survey by *die-zeitungen.de*.<sup>25</sup> Also, among the German most visited websites are *Spiegel.de* (ranked 8<sup>th</sup>) and *Bild.de* (ranked 9<sup>th</sup>), the online versions of two leading print media outlets.<sup>26</sup>

In Singapore, among the 20 most viewed websites were not only *Yahoo! Singapore News* (ranked 5<sup>th</sup>) but also *Channel NewsAsia* (ranked 12<sup>th</sup>) and *AsiaOne* (ranked 15<sup>th</sup>).<sup>27</sup> This shows that while a proportion of internet users will use online news providers like *Yahoo* and *Google* for their news, the online versions of TV or print media do not lag behind by much.

What has been labelled the 'generation web 2.0' of social networking and online interactivity is a generation that uses new media for precisely those reasons – recreational rather than informative

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<http://www.marketresearch.com/Centre-for-Telecoms-Research-Ltd-v3461/Germany-Internet-Statistics-1466876/>

<sup>23</sup> Holland et al, p. 186, at note 108.

<sup>24</sup> From 71% in 2006 to 82% in 2010. See: Infocomm Development Authority of Singapore (IDA), 'Infocomm Usage - Households and Individuals'.

<sup>25</sup> Die Zeitungen (2012) 'Print wird mobil' ['Print goes mobile'] [in German], 16 July 2012, available online at:

<http://www.die-zeitungen.de/die-zeitungen/news/article/print-wird-mobil.html?print=1&cHash=b879d3dc08a2573267dc125e85e99d2c>

<sup>26</sup> Alexa (website) 'Top sites in Germany', available online at: <http://www.alexa.com/topsites/countries/DE>

<sup>27</sup> Experian Hitwise (website) 'Top Websites and Search Engine Analysis' available online at:

<http://www.hitwise.com/sg/datacentre/main/>

purposes. If we look at official Facebook pages, the European Commission has just over 64,000 'likes', while the ASEAN Secretariat has just over 10,000 'likes'.<sup>28</sup> These figures amount to merely 0.01% and 0.002% of the respective populations of both regional blocs. In comparison, the Facebook page of singer Lady Gaga has over 53 million 'likes'.<sup>29</sup> Meanwhile the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the only concrete institution arising from the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process garnered very few 'likes'. A similar picture can be found on Twitter where the ASEAN Secretariat has 5,867 followers and the European Union at least 17,313. ASEF is virtually invisible again. Considering the limited reach and often incidental quality of information gathered in these contexts, we believe that the original methodology, relying on the printed media and television, is still as valid as ever.

The public opinion section of the data merits further consideration. Given that the public opinion as recorded in the project goes against the traditional assumption that perceptions are shaped by the mass media, what arises then is a phenomenon here which Bersick et al. dub the 'mystery of public opinion'.<sup>30</sup> In order to de-mystify this phenomenon, we propose some explanations. It is indisputable that conventional media play a role, and not a negligible one. However, other important aspects that ought to be taken into account range from the cultural awareness of the classical arts (music, the visual arts) and material culture (fashion products, for instance) to very simple everyday encounters with people in real life. We believe that the short-term and short-lived media and periodicals have a decisive, yet also shorter range, and perhaps shallower impact on the much more long term opinion forming processes.

It is an important underlying fact that neither in Asia nor in Europe is there yet a fully consolidated cultural or political identity of the people, or at least not anything that would supersede the relatively stronger national identities. As a corollary, there is also not a monolithic 'European' view of Asia, nor an 'Asian' view of Europe. This consideration further justifies limiting our paper to using the dataset for two selected

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<sup>28</sup> The respective Facebook pages

(<http://www.facebook.com/EuropeanCommission>; and <http://www.facebook.com/aseansecretariat>), as accessed on 16 October 2012.

<sup>29</sup> See: <http://www.facebook.com/ladygaga>, as accessed on 16 October 2012.

<sup>30</sup> Bersick et al, p. 272

countries. In any case, any attempt to capture the diapason of voices that constitutes European and Asian views of the world would be impracticable.

The analysis of past perception studies stressed the heterogeneity<sup>31</sup> of Asia and the low to negligible visibility of its actors.<sup>32</sup> This is due to the obvious lack of desire even to entertain the notion of possible unification in Asia. 'Only the ASEAN countries speak of Asia', commented a French media professional from *Le Monde*.<sup>33</sup> The rest of Asia has no agenda to speak as a unified voice, not even as an economic block. This translates into the perception of Asia as a region characterised by the few strong national players and many grey areas in between. So while both major regions exhibit significant internal heterogeneity, only one of them has organised itself into a formal institutionalised bloc of states, ultimately seeking unity and a common voice in international politics. This is perhaps the most distinct asymmetry of the data available from the two studies.

### Media analysis

As in the 2006 study, the visibility of the EU/Europe and Asia in selected media outlets was established in terms of quantity of news items. In Singapore, the three major newspapers (*The Straits Times* as Singapore's most important daily newspaper, *The Business Times* as Singapore's only financial daily and *Lianhe Zaobao* as the most-read Chinese language newspaper in Singapore) and the popular Channel 8 news (with a market share of 34%) were monitored for a six-month period (January to June 2011).<sup>34</sup> The German data were collected from a major quality newspaper, *Die Süddeutsche Zeitung*, the most popular tabloid *Bild Zeitung*, and the daily 8pm TV news, *Tagesschau*, with a comparable market share to its Singaporean counterpart of 34.4%.<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately for the

synchronicity with the Singapore data, the German data were collected only over a 13-week period in late 2010. And although we cannot fill the aforementioned gap in search definition here (between 'EU' or 'European Union/EU', on the one hand, and 'Asia' and 'Asian', on the other), a simple online newspaper archive search should help give an idea of the proportional visibility of 'Europe' compared to 'European Union/EU'.<sup>36</sup>

In terms of the number of news items on 'Asia', one finds in the German media an average of 18.5 news items a week over the three media outlets, corresponding to 6.2 news items per week per outlet, for a total of 240 items over the 13-week period. On the Singaporean side, however, when picking only the news items mentioning the EU or its institutions specifically, one finds an average of 40 items per week in the four media outlets, corresponding to 10 items per outlet per week, or 1,041 items over the 26 week period. This places the visibility of the EU and its institutions at a much higher level compared to the reportage of Asia in German media, which in fact comprises more diverse topics such as culture, food, holidays. Looking at the additional data collected for the present investigation from the online search, for the search term 'Europe' one finds 709 articles in *The Straits Times*, comparing to 160 in the same newspaper for the same timeframe including the search term 'EU' or 'European Union'.

Seen in light of the more recent and current political and economic climate, the economic problems, the sovereign debt issue and the ongoing institutional crisis in Europe come to the fore. These events boost the numbers of news items due to the potentially global impact and the consequent relevance to Singaporean media consumers. The fact that crises and disasters lead to more extensive news coverage is widely attested: one only needs to consider the coverage of Japan in the context of the earthquake and subsequent nuclear problems in Fukushima around March 2011.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, p.282

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, p.277

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 273

<sup>34</sup> Monitored were articles containing: European Union/EU; eurozone; euro; European Commission/EC; European Parliament/EP; European Central Bank /ECB; European Court of Justice/ECJ; Asia-Europe Meeting/ASEM.

<sup>35</sup> To be included articles had to contain the following search terms: Asia, Asian. Asia-Europe-Meeting/ ASEM, Association of Southeast Asian Nations/ ASEAN, South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation/ SAARC, ASEAN Regional Forum/ ARF, Shanghai Cooperation Organization/ SCO, Asia Pacific Economic Cooperation/ APEC.

<sup>36</sup> Factiva (<https://global.factiva.com>) search, accessed 5 September 2012, searching *The Straits Times* and *The Business Times* for articles including the term 'Europe', be it within or outside the context of the EU for the same time span (1 January – 30 June 2011), as for the Asian data set.

<sup>37</sup> This can be underlined by using online searches as for example the search engine on the German newspaper *Die Welt's* website. The search term 'Japan' produced 550 articles in the time between 1 March to 31 July 2010 but 2,337 in the same period one year later. See online at: <http://suchen.welt.de/woa/search.do?method=search>

Comparing these figures of Europe-related articles in the Singaporean news to the previous round of data collection in 2006, with the average of 11.6 news items per week and per outlet,<sup>38</sup> one draws the conclusion that the volume of news items has remained almost unchanged or even reduced marginally compared to the pre-crisis years. This shows that, perhaps contrary to expectations, the crisis does not seem to have had the effect of inflating the number of articles in the overall news coverage.

An interesting observation could be made in the light of centrality: In Germany only 13.8% of the news items were framed 'Asia' as a main item, comparing to nearly twice as many in Singapore. In both locations however the predominant frame was the minor one (61.7% in Germany<sup>39</sup> and 54.5% in Singapore), showing that the bulk of the news is still deemed to be of minor importance, and that the theme of an article is often independent of the location (even if this be continent-size) in or across which the theme (economic upturn/slowdown etc. for example) is considered as taking place. This would be consistent with a view of increasing globalisation and interdependence.

Often then perhaps a mere geographic image of Asia is portrayed in the German media, rather than a political or social one. Therefore, the gap between the focus of domesticity, which puts Asia first, and the degree of centrality, which shows Asia as being a minor focus, indicates that the events that take place in Asia and involve Asian actors do not necessarily deal with issues which are specifically 'Asian'. In the Singaporean data, the explanation is most probably to be found in the fact that the 'EU' was the selection term for the news items. Hence, the results may be indicative of the low local and regional relevance of the EU. The outcome is likely to have been different, had the 'European' news items been monitored. Proportionally, however, the figures on centrality clearly show that, if there is a news item on the 'EU', it is more likely to be within the major frame in Singapore than any 'Asian' news item is in Germany. So much is only to be expected, of course, given that a higher proportion of the news relating to the EU will be of major relevance to the survey than for example European sports or cultural items, which are disregarded.

<sup>38</sup> Data collection in January – December 2006 in the same four media outlets, counting 2422 articles in total, as in: Holland et al, p. 166

<sup>39</sup> Bersick et al, p. 139

In terms of the evaluation of Asia compared to the EU/Europe, news items in the case of Germany inclined towards the positive, whereas in the Singaporean case, the negative evaluation of news items outweighed the positive ones by a ratio of four to one. Whereas in both data sets the main body of news was covered neutrally, in Singapore the negative articles amounted to 28.6% compared to approximately 8% in Germany. This is most probably to be explained within the context of the euro crisis and Asians' lack of confidence in the EU's ability to resolve the problems, especially compared to the much more balanced image in 2006 which showed a neutral evaluation of 69%, a positive proportion of 18% and a negative of 13%.<sup>40</sup>

Looking at the overall topical framing, the priorities in the Singaporean media are even more pronounced than in the German case. Three quarters of all 1041 registered news items dealt with the economy and the economic state of affairs, compared to 45% of the German news items. Involvement with each other in the context of social affairs, amounting to 30% of the German articles, was considered in only 8.3% of the news items in Singapore. It perhaps reflects the identity of the European Union in Singapore primarily as an economic partner – as a bloc, the EU is the second largest Singaporean trading partner after Malaysia in 2011<sup>41</sup> – but not as much of a newsworthy social or humanitarian actor as the EU sees itself.<sup>42</sup>

The mutual political visibility was found to be comparatively similar (20.8% in Germany and 17% in Singapore). However, one needs to take into account the dominating position China holds in the German news, accounting for a large proportion of recorded items and making other Asian actors pale in comparison.

<sup>40</sup> Ma Shaohua 'Media Analysis of Singapore' (unpublished Microsoft Powerpoint slides), based on the findings January – October 2006 of the original EUiA project.

<sup>41</sup> Department of Statistics, Singapore (Singstat) (website) 'Trade with major partners', last updated 25 July 2012, available online at:

<http://www.singstat.gov.sg/stats/visualiser/trade/trade.html>

<sup>42</sup> 'The [CFSP] aims to strengthen the EU's external ability to act through the development of civilian and military capabilities in Conflict Prevention and Crisis Management. To influence policies violating international law or human rights, or policies disrespectful of the rule of law or democratic principles, the EU has designed sanctions of a diplomatic or economic nature'. From: European External Action Service (website) 'Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) of the European Union', available online at:

[http://www.eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/index\\_en.htm](http://www.eeas.europa.eu/cfsp/index_en.htm)

Due to the asymmetry in the data, individual member states of the EU might feature in Asian news more than one can determine from the data at hand. This will most probably boost the 17% German record in Singapore, by an extent that would need to be determined by further qualitative research.

Television news items amounted to only a tiny percentage of the total number of news items recorded (3 out of 240, and 34 out of 1041), which is to be expected given the very limited time frame on primetime television news and the limited number of frames in total, compared to the extensive coverage possibilities in newspapers. However, interestingly, all the television items recorded dealt with politics on the European side, mirroring only 11.8% political TV news in Singapore. It remains an open question whether this is due to the EU's low political visibility, the Asian emphasis on trade and economics or the distinctive time frame, which was rather limited on both sides, and especially on the German one.

Asia as a regional frame seems to be not nearly as visible as common parlance might suggest. This ties in well with what is elaborated below, namely, that the 'rise of Asia' is in fact a phrase used in reference to the rise of individual countries – of China, and India, first and foremost. This conclusion could be tested if a similar study were done on the reportage of China in the German media (and not only in the context of EU or ASEM news). Searching for the terms 'China' and 'Asien' [Asia in German] for the 13-week period through the Süddeutsche Zeitung Archiv online search engine yields 1,270 results for the former and 408 for the latter.

### **Media elite interviews<sup>43</sup>**

The German media elite interviewees included in the survey reported that they rely first and foremost on their own correspondents. All of those interviewed had at least one in Asia, specifically in China, and if more than one, then in other Asian locations as well. Additionally local assistants were mentioned, as well as

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<sup>43</sup> In this section we believe the discrepancy between the data sets to be less pronounced and virtually irrelevant as 'news on Europe' and 'EU news' are terms which are practically used interchangeably by correspondents. Even news on individual member states will have been conceptually linked in the interviewees' minds and therefore have figured in their answers.

international and local news agencies<sup>44</sup> On the Singaporean side, one media respondent emphasised his paper's widely-established system of correspondents:

*[...] The Straits Times, among major newspapers around the world, still has a relatively large number of foreign correspondents. [...] Our former editor-in-chief [...] used to refer to it as our crown jewels. The reason why we send out foreign correspondents is so that we can get foreign news based on Singapore's perspective.<sup>45</sup>*

The newspaper in question, however, does not maintain a correspondent in Brussels; its 'Europe correspondent' is based in London.

For European/EU news however, the Singapore media relies heavily on the major newswire sources of Anglo-American origin (and in the case of Agence-France Presse, French). That is not the case in the German media's reportage of Asia. Like the Singaporean media respondent cited above, the German respondents emphasised their predominant reliance on a network of correspondents, while additionally expressing suspicion at the reliability of Asian news agencies. This might also explain the very limited coverage of Asia (that is, as a search term) in Europe, and shows a significant deficit when considering the inter-communication in media terms between the two greater continental regions. It remains to surmise that the situation would be markedly different, were the Asian news agencies like Kyodo and Xinhua managed in a manner more similar to that of their western equivalents. The consequence of this observation is that Asian news items are inevitably 'filtered' by a European journalist, with inevitable effect on the understanding and evaluation of the news communicated.

In terms of proactivity and reactivity, there were differences among the news outlets in Germany with some respondents, especially correspondents and freelance journalists, who favoured assuming a proactive, rather than a reactive role. In contrast, the editors tended to see the need to react to current events. In Singapore, the tenor was much more uniform, reporting either a clearly reactive action, or making it dependant on the story at hand. This may illustrate the

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<sup>44</sup> Bersick et al, pp. 156-7.

<sup>45</sup> From the unpublished transcripts of the elite interviews for the 2010-11 EUiA project.



fact that Asia is qualitatively perceived as a more dynamic and increasingly important region, whereas the EU appears to represent not so much a dynamic actor to engage with, but rather an entity to react to.

In Germany, there was a clear majority expecting a shift in the news towards Asia. Among the topics to be tackled in this context, economy, environmental protection, human rights and various social aspects were mentioned; interestingly, no purely political topics came up.<sup>46</sup> Unsurprisingly, news on China was deemed among the most important of subjects. This was echoed on the Singaporean side, with India showing up as the next most important country subject. Some interviewees also mentioned Europe and the crisis, indicating that the shift would go where the news is, although not necessarily with a positive connotation.

On both sides there was scepticism expressed as to how reliable the news disseminated proactively by bodies like regional organisations and governments could be<sup>47</sup> – in Germany even more so than in Singapore. In Singapore, some respondents declared a rather opportunistic attitude, willing to use such information if it were in plain language and for free. In Germany, the majority indicated interest and said that they might use it in guest author sections or for research, but scepticism prevailed. In the light of these attitudes it appears that more weight and perceived reliability are likely to be assigned to established European institutions than to the less well-known Asian regional organisations. Especially in the case of ASEM, a lack of awareness and information was acknowledged by the media professionals:<sup>48</sup> so even if they would not use proactively disseminated news uncritically or directly, further and more proactive outreach activities might positively influence the awareness of bodies, issues and policies, at least by the media ‘opinion leaders’.

In terms of news selection criteria, the factors of timeliness, interest and general relevance (‘newsworthiness’) were common to both Singaporean and German interviewees, with a much more pronounced focus in Singapore on the impact and influence for Singapore, in both the political and economic sense. Surprisingly, no interviewee from Germany mentioned direct relevance for their country.

<sup>46</sup> Bersick et al, p. 159

<sup>47</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 158

<sup>48</sup> From the unpublished transcripts of the elite interviews for the 2010-11 EUiA project.

Overall, Asian topics were agreed to ‘sell well’, with the caveat that obviously ‘content counts’. This latter concept was echoed by their Singaporean counterparts, declaring ‘news is news’ when it comes to selling a story. However the criterion of relevance for Singapore was mentioned again, with the opinion that the EU was becoming increasingly irrelevant to Singapore as well as to the world at large. This clearly echoes the above-mentioned relative decline in the EU-related news items recorded in the media, suggesting that the EU is being seen as an entity with declining importance for the Southeast Asian countries, relative to other world powers like China.

Personal perceptions and associations of the EU were mixed, ranging from ‘bureaucratic’ over ‘historic and democratic empire’ to ‘a tottering organisation of nations to further their own interests’.

One interviewee said that

*I think of an economic bloc, I think of free movement of people, of goods, I think of the economic size [...and of the] free movement of goods and labour. [Also] I think of Germany and France, I still think they are the main drivers.<sup>49</sup>*

Another said he thought of the EU as

*The modern Roman Empire – only without an army. [...] But the notion of European consciousness, of a European entity... I mean it's a fantastic thing that they've achieved. But right now, you've problems, because you've a common currency... a monetary union that has got no basis in a fiscal union or a political union. [... Some] predict the demise of the euro – [this] sort of reflects the pessimism that is felt in some circles.<sup>50</sup>*

These quotations illustrate that the fiscal debt crises in individual member states such as Greece, Portugal and Spain were overwhelmingly prominent. Individual countries were frequently singled out, so while the EU received some credit for its combined economic clout, its lack of a unified political voice was also attested. Compared to other global actors like the US and China, the EU was found lacking.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>50</sup> *Ibid.*

On the German side, the majority of the interviewees denied that they perceived Asia as a great power. Those who did specified in the course of the interview that they saw big players in Asia, notably, of course, China. As a region, unsurprisingly, Asia was perceived as fragmented and heterogeneous, lacking unity and institutionalisation of common interests. Whereas this is as expected, it highlights the extent to which the two regions considered are structured differently. On the one hand, this ties in with the aforementioned lack of will for further integration in the greater Asian region. However, one could also argue that the results show that the premise of an 'entity Asia' (which the publication titles seem to suggest), does not reflect reality. Countries such as China, India and Japan,<sup>51</sup> on the other hand, are seen as established great powers of their own right. In parallel with the common point of criticism for the EU, the respondents didn't perceive Asia as 'speaking with one voice', but rather as seeing the political issues and interests as too diverse in order for the whole region to be perceived as 'rising'.

Important issues for Singapore when dealing with and thinking of the EU were predominantly trade and economics, with links to investment and the crisis, economic growth and the ongoing negotiations of an FTA. This very clear and predictable picture is met with a more diverse one on the German side: the biggest impact in Germany was also trade, business and economy, but that accounted for only two-thirds of the responses. The issues raised also concerned raw materials (13%) and human rights (with a surprisingly low fraction of 20%, seen against the backdrop of the European self-definition as key exporter of human rights and justice<sup>52</sup>), especially in the context of China. Some hope was expressed that the focus might change to greener topics (echoing the public opinion findings) and some recognition of the societies behind the economics, leading to a more human as well as political coverage of the region. This seems to confirm certain expectations that Europeans focus on more than trade in an international context – the moral and

<sup>51</sup> German-Japanese relations are still robust, especially within the economic field, based on the 'Seven pillars of cooperation' – see: Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan (website) 'Summary of the Japan-Federal Republic of Germany Regular Foreign Ministerial Consultation', available online at:

<http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/germany/meet0010.html>

<sup>52</sup> European External Action Service (website) 'The EU and human rights', available online at:

[http://eeas.europa.eu/human\\_rights/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/human_rights/index_en.htm)

humanitarian dimension of EU external relation is, as we shall see below, much more firmly established in the heads of Europeans and European policy leaders than perceived by the external entities the EU interacts with.

In terms of quantifiable importance, the EU was deemed to be currently at the level of about 3 out of 5, with a divergence of opinions about the future. Asia was seen as more important to Germany, with a 3.8 presently, and the average level of about 4.3 expected in the future. There were no opinions expressing doubt over Asia's increasing importance.

The media industry is certainly one of the most important aspects to consider when assessing how a regional entity like Europe or Asia is communicated and perceived. However, it would be a simplification to assume that this forms the only important source of judgement on the matter. The figures shown in the following section illustrate that the elite opinions may sometimes diverge<sup>53</sup> from the very public opinion they influence and shape. For a balanced and significant analysis, it is of vital importance to consider the broader public opinion.

### Public opinion

Within the two projects ASiE and EUiA, the public opinion survey element was the one that differed most, not only in terms of the survey content, but also as far as the foci and the method of evaluation are concerned. This should be kept in mind when comparing the findings from the two studies throughout this section. Nonetheless, the parts that lend themselves to useful comparison yield additional insight and can be contrasted and compared to the media findings above.

Matching the findings in the media analysis, the general German public was reported to have an overall positive evaluation of Asia. 'Almost 80% answered the question about the general impression of Asians [...] with mostly or somewhat positive or neutral feelings'.<sup>54</sup> On the Singaporean side, the view of the EU is actually more enthusiastic than the media coverage would suggest, with 86% of the people interviewed rating the EU as either positive or neutral. Even taking into account the categorical differences between 'Asians' and 'EU', i.e. focusing on the people of Asian domiciliation on the

<sup>53</sup> Bersick et al, p.272

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 145

one hand, and on the institutional organisation of the European continent on the other; and given the definitional vagueness of Europe and Asia as entities, it might still be appropriate to see these figures as meaningfully comparable and similar.

The importance of individual countries can be compared in a rather limited way: Germans have rated the US<sup>55</sup> as the most important country for the future of Germany (18.2%), followed by China (14.4%), Russia (13%), Japan (11%) and India (10%). No other ASEM country was seen as having any significant perceived impact on the German future. This question approximately corresponds to one of the questions in the EUiA data: 56% of Singaporeans have rated the Asian region (i.e. other Asian ASEM actors) as very important, but only 28% the EU (together with the 'somewhat important' option this reaches around 80%). Compared to the individual countries' 'very important', this is quite high, with the United Kingdom (21%), Germany (15%) and France and Russia (both 9%) lagging behind. The US, with the overall importance of 94% and a 'very important' status of 58%, is still a long way behind China with the 'very important' rating of 71%.

In this study the common and general importance of the US for both the EU and (South-East) Asia and its potential interplay in perceived relative importance has been deliberately omitted. Not only however is the US globally predominant as a hard power, but it also plays an important role as economic giant. 16.8% of all North American trade (NAFTA) is conducted with the European Union and 21% with Asia as a whole<sup>56</sup> – these are nonetheless substantial proportions of world trade and certainly an aspect of soft and hard power as well as a factor in perceived importance and visibility. The implications of this however are not sufficiently documented in our data and offer potential for future research.

Russia is a special case for discussion, given its fuzzy regional identity. A country that stretches further east than China, it is formally considered an Asian ASEM member state, yet it shared a war front with Germany historically. For Singapore, Russia seems to still be in

the middle range of relevance, even with its rising profile (41% perceived Russia as important partner for Singapore, 49% expected it to be such in five years' time). Only 13% of Germans however deemed Russia to be of crucial importance for the future of Germany. Here the statistical methods are preventing us from drawing substantial conclusions, as the Singaporean data tries to rate the importance of countries, whereas the German data asked for 'the most determining countries for Germany's future'.<sup>57</sup> So maybe the 13% in Germany are to be seen in the light of 4% of Singaporeans who deemed Russia to be 'very important' to their country at the moment, and 9% who expected this to be the case in five years.

The relationship between Singapore and the EU/Europe was voted by Singaporeans to be vastly neutral or good, with only 2% giving it 1 or 2 points in a ranking out of 5, but 65% rating it at 4 and above. This may be reflected in the high ranking of Singapore in the German 'feeling towards Asian country' data, being 5<sup>th</sup> after Australia, New Zealand, the US and Japan, with a score of 3.3. Also, we might compare this to a ranking of regional organisations in Germany, giving ASEAN an importance index of 6.4 on a scale from 10 (important) to 1 (unimportant).

Cooperation between the countries and regions has also been assessed in both cases. In the Singaporean public opinion, the cooperation priorities with the EU should be distributed as follows: economic (83%), cultural/scientific (47%), political (39%) and military (28%). This is very different on the German side, focusing only to a limited extent on trade (15%), but emphasising environmental protection (19%), human rights and democracy, security and anti-terrorism (both 16%) and energy and natural resources (14%).

This shows a very different emphasis in German public opinion not only to the Singaporean one but also to an extent to its own media coverage. The emphasis on topics like trade and economical considerations as communicated by the mass media is obviously not matched by public awareness. The high percentage of environmentally concerned citizens as well as considerations on democracy, security and energy issues do reflect the German political landscape, where the German Green Party is uncharacteristically strong in comparison with the rest of Europe, with the German government's decision to follow through with the

<sup>55</sup> The US is not an ASEM member, but was listed to provide a means of comparison.

<sup>56</sup> World Trade Organization (website) 'International Trade Statistics 2011' available online at: [http://www.wto.org/english/res\\_e/statis\\_e/its2011\\_e/its2011\\_e.pdf](http://www.wto.org/english/res_e/statis_e/its2011_e/its2011_e.pdf)

<sup>57</sup> Bersick et al, p. 151

phasing-out of nuclear power, and where a dynamic political discourse about renewable energies thrives.

### The case of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM), as interregional forum consisting of the European Commission, the twenty-seven member states of the EU and the thirteen members of the ASEAN +3 regional grouping as well as India, Mongolia, Pakistan and, as of 2010, Australia, Russia and New Zealand (and, as of late 2012, Bangladesh, Norway and Switzerland), is no doubt worth singling out in the context of this paper. The visibility and recognition of this process might be an indicator of the success of its objectives in the area of deepening relations between Asia and Europe and achieving more balanced political and economical relations.

The data of the media analyses on the visibility of ASEM was directly comparable from both studies. The figures in both cases were disappointingly low (2.08% of news items on the German side and 0.58% on the Singaporean), with even fewer articles in Singapore than in Germany. This, however, may stem from the fact that the 2010 ASEM summit fell within the period of data collection in Germany, but not in Singapore.

On the level of the media elite representatives the picture was not much different: five out of the twelve German respondents admitted to being totally unaware of the process; and those who had heard of it did not attach much importance to it. No one rejected it as a bad idea; however, scepticism prevailed as to its effectiveness or influence. On the Singaporean side, the picture was rather similar, with none of the respondents able to recall the summit of 2010. The impact was also broadly qualified as limited to negligible. The invisibility in the published media reflects this lack of importance attached to it by the media professionals. As one German foreign correspondent put it:

*Either I am too ignorant, or ASEM needs to improve its PR work [...] right now, from the top of my head, I have no idea what impact the ASEM process could possibly have.*<sup>58</sup>

<sup>58</sup> Foreign correspondent of *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*, in Bersick et al, p. 162.

Quantitatively similar were the responses from both German and Singaporean public opinion findings, where the ASEM meetings gained an equally low profile as in the media findings. In Germany, only 3.1% said that they were familiar with the acronym, yet 72.8% were certain that the dialogue process was very important and necessary for German-Asian relations. Only 11.5% were doubtful about the results of the process or deemed it unnecessary.<sup>59</sup> This reaffirms what Bauer pointed out that there ‘seems to be a difference between what is important to the German people and what they think *will* or rather *should* be important’.<sup>60</sup> As to where this discrepancy stems from can only be speculated – perhaps from a combination of factors ranging from education, public discussion on immigration, the media itself as well as maybe a certain awareness that their perception of ‘the Other’ is stereotypical and rather one-dimensional. In Singapore, at least 34% proclaimed to be familiar with the process, and comparably many (69%) considered it important overall.

### Conclusion

The results presented here have been published in part and discussed previously only in isolation. Here, for the first time, we are able to compare the findings of the two studies. The two projects, EUiA and ASiE were set up in direct ‘mirror’ relation to each other. Nevertheless, some degree of asymmetry in the project methodology and formulation was unavoidable.

Compared to the visibility of the EU (barring geographical or ethnographical references to ‘Europe’) in the Singaporean media, Asia has been found to be even less visible in German media. This is surprising, considering the amount of trade and travel exchanges between Germany and Asia at large. The overall importance of the EU might be perceived as declining compared to the continued importance of the US and the rise of Asian economies, particularly of China and India. In the quantitative evaluation however, the EU remains visible in both economic and political contexts, and is still deemed an important partner on the world stage, certainly in the perception of the national elite. Perhaps it is the prominence of the established regional framework that aids clearer perception: qualitatively the studies suggest a mutual fuzziness of perception

<sup>59</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 153

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 152

and a degree of general ignorance, especially in terms of the ASEM process and Asian regional organisations.

Asia, as an entity, is not perceived to be rising, nor is it even perceived as a region. Germans are mostly unaware of the different regional integration processes in various parts of Asia. Rather, the images conveyed were of China and India as rising giants, of Japan as a manufacturing economy strongly allied with Germany, and of holiday destinations such as Thailand and Bali. On the Asian side, the analysis of media coverage and the general public awareness of the European institutions suggest that the EU is certainly visible, yet understood only superficially and deemed less important than before. This is an obvious consequence of the different motivations, intentions and stages of regional integration efforts. While Asians attached some importance to the EU, they also perceived individual European countries as significant. Thus, while the EU is perceived more as an entity than Asia is, the differentiated visibility of the single states does not appear to be declining. The limited perceived visibility of the EU as an institutional body might have found (if maybe unjustly<sup>61</sup>) a symbol in the so far still somewhat less established High Representative of Foreign Affairs and Security Policy Baroness Catherine Ashton, than her more recognised predecessor Javier Solana as 'external face' of the EU.<sup>62</sup>

The findings also show that public expectations of what the priorities of cooperation between Asia and Europe should be differ to a certain extent. As expected, the trade and business cooperation is the most important theme for both regions. The image that the EU attempts to project to its external partners and to European citizens of a human rights and environmental champion, alongside its trade and business powers and activities, is not necessarily appreciated or recognised by their Asian partners.

The datasets available have not provided opportunities for more direct comparison between the two studies. Spontaneous images of the EU and of Europe differ to a certain extent, and throughout the whole comparison

we had to be aware of the underlying differences. It would be highly interesting for Europe-Asia relations not just to look at the EU's visibility, but also its distinctiveness from 'Europe' that still gives rise to associations far beyond the political and economical. The fact that the EU wants to project itself as humanitarian, soft power and ethical actor on the world stage does not mean that it is perceived as such. Comparing the EU's perception data with that of individual member states or that of 'Europe' is likely to give a more nuanced picture of how the EU is projecting itself.<sup>63</sup> Equally, any future study containing reference to an 'Asian' perception will have to take into consideration the vastly heterogeneous nature of the wider region and be aware of its definitional challenges. What this comparison has shown is not only the need for further public diplomacy and outreach to promote understanding and awareness of the EU, but also efforts to differentiate the view and knowledge the Europeans have of Asia. The ASEM process could play an operative part in this and will need to seek the limelight in future years in order to impact the relations between the two greater regions linked indefinitely by being part of the same landmass.

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<sup>61</sup>The restructuring of the European Common Foreign and Security Policy pillar of the EU to become the European External Action Service (EEAS) will have been partly responsible for the delay of recognition for Catherine Ashton.

<sup>62</sup>Loke Hoe Yeong and Yeo Lay Hwee (2012) 'Who acts for the EU before and after the Lisbon Treaty? The view through the media in Singapore and Thailand' [forthcoming journal article].

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<sup>63</sup>On this distinction between Europe and the EU in Singaporean public opinion (at least among tertiary students), cp. Turner, Barnard (2009) 'The perceptions of the European Union among tertiary education students in Singapore', *Asia-Europe Journal*, 7:2, 225-240.

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