

Book launch and presentation:

Check against delivery

Changing Tides and Changing Ties – Anchoring Asia-Europe relations in challenging times

EU Centre in Singapore, 4 December 2012

Presentation by Michael Matthiessen

Excellencies, Ladies and Gentlemen, If I may, Dear friends,

Good morning,

As the 2012-2013 visiting fellow from the European Union at the Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, at NUS, it is a great pleasure for me to address you this morning on the occasion of the launch of this new book on Asia-Europe relations.

Let me first congratulate the EU Centre and its Director, Dr Yeo Lay Hwee, for having taken this excellent initiative. To publish a

book on Asia-Europe relations is both relevant and timely – not least, as the title says, as these are challenging times for this relationship.

Having read the book I can only confirm that the collection of essays by academics, diplomats, journalists and young Asians and Europeans is a testimony of the richness of the relations between the two regions, but also of challenges in both Europe and Asia, at present and ahead of us.

It was a particular pleasure for me as a European to read the foreword by H. E. the Foreign Minister of Singapore, Mr Shanmugan, who confirms that there is much untapped potential for Asia-Europe cooperation and much that we can learn from one another. The various contributions in the book provide a long list of such areas where the two regions can profit from each other's experience. I found the short chapter written by Professor and Ambassador Tommy Koh particularly inspiring.

Having arrived to Singapore only three months ago, I note that most of the news about Europe here is linked to the so-called "Euro-crisis" or sovereign debt crisis. This is quite

understandable. On this background it is heartening to read in the Foreign Minister's foreword that the European Union will undoubtedly emerge from the current crisis stronger than before. This is also my personal opinion – and this is how the European Union has developed after previous crises.

Another proof that the EU is much more than the EURO is the event which will take place on Monday in Oslo. On that day the European Union will receive the Nobel Peace Prize 2012. According to the Nobel Committee the prize was awarded to the EU “for having over six decades contributed to the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe”. As the Dean of the Lee Kuan Yew School, Professor Mahbubani, said recently: this prize is well deserved as there is no longer prospect for war in Europe! Hopefully the same can soon be said about Asia.

In my own contribution to the book, which was written some months ago, I try to explain the recent changes in the institutional set up in the EU – and how the new system under the Lisbon Treaty can have an impact also on the EU-Asia relations. With more permanent structures, that is the establishment of both the European Council and the European External Action Service – the EEAS -, and the election of Mr van

Rompuy and Lady Ashton who both will be in their functions for 5 years, as well as Mr Barroso who will stay as President of the Commission for 10 years, the EU is now in a better position to handle its important relations with countries in Asia. And this year, 2012, has been “the year of Asia in the European Union”. The list of summits and visits to Asia is long – and the most recent event was the ASEM 9 Summit in Vientiane/Laos attended by both Mr van Rompuy and Mr Barroso as well as most Heads of State or Government from the 27 EU Member States. This was an important occasion for Asian and European leaders to meet collectively, but also bilaterally in the margins of the Summit, to discuss the global challenges and the situation in both regions as well as the future cooperation.

This year has also seen some important meetings in the context of ASEAN, an organization which has the full support of the European Union. In April an action plan for EU-ASEAN-cooperation over the next 5 years was agreed and in July the EU signed the TAC – the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation. It will now be important to ensure the implementation and the follow up.

In addition to summits, ministerial meetings and visits important work is going on as regards free trade agreements

(FTAs) and partnership and cooperation agreements (PCAs). The FTA between the EU and South Korea entered into force in 2011 and just last week the Council took the decision to launch negotiations on a FTA with Japan. As we are in Singapore, and as mentioned by the Minister a few minutes ago, let us hope that a FTA between the EU and Singapore can be concluded before the end of this month. This would be a very important agreement for many reasons – also because it would be the first FTA between a member of ASEAN and the EU.

Trade is not the only thing that brings Asia and Europe together. However, we cannot deny that this is an important part of our relationship as we are the world's two largest trading regions. As stated by the Foreign Minister in the foreword our economies are more interlinked than ever before.

As described in the book there is much more to our relationship than trade. There is history, culture, regional cooperation, people to people contact and how to tackle the 21st century's many challenges: climate change, sustainable growth, security etc. In all these areas the EU and Asia can learn from each other and improve our cooperation.

Excellencies, ladies and gentlemen, dear friends,

Let me once again congratulate the EU Centre on taking the initiative to publish this book on Asia-Europe relations and thank all the contributors. As the EU visiting fellow at the Lee Kuan Yew School I find the book an excellent contribution to further develop the relations between our two regions – Asia and Europe. We need each other, especially in these challenging times. Thank you.