

## Asia/Europe/Australia dialogue: building knowledge from each other's experiences

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This special issue of the *Asia Europe Journal* focuses on a triangulated conversation between scholars working in/on Asia, Europe and Australia. The essays showcase the work of early career researchers involved in the EU-Oceania Social Science Inter-regional Consortium (EUOSSIC) Erasmus Mundus exchange programme that links leading universities in Europe<sup>1</sup> with those in Australia<sup>2</sup> and New Zealand<sup>3</sup> to promote the study of European Union (EU) external relationships. Erasmus Mundus was launched in 2004 and is funded by the Education and Culture Directorate General of the European Commission with the objectives of enhancing the quality of European higher education and the promotion of dialogue and understanding between people and cultures through cooperation with third countries. The aim of the EUOSSIC Erasmus Mundus exchange programme (2011–2013) is to build on existing connections to create a formal programme of inter-regional exchanges between the EU and Oceania for doctoral and post-

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<sup>1</sup>The six European universities involved are as follows: University of Limerick (Ireland), University of Bath (United Kingdom), Sciences Po in Paris (France), Charles University in Prague (Czech Republic), Libera Università Internazionale degli Studi Sociali—Guido Carli (Italy) and the Free University of Berlin (Germany).

<sup>2</sup>The three Australian universities involved are as follows: Monash University, University of Sydney and the Australian National University.

<sup>3</sup>The two New Zealand universities involved are as follows: University of Canterbury and Victoria University of Wellington.

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doctoral scholars as well as academic staff with a Social Science background. In total, 61 doctoral students, 11 post-doctoral fellows and 27 academic staff were involved in the EUOSSIC Erasmus Mundus programme.

In July 2012, the ANU Centre for European Studies (ANUCES) in Canberra organized a workshop gathering together European doctoral and post-doctoral Erasmus Mundus fellows undertaking their research at Australian and New Zealand universities and Australian and New Zealand fellows who had returned from Europe. The workshop was an opportunity to present their current research and to obtain feedback from senior scholars in the field. The essays in this publication are the result of this intellectual exchange.

The publication demonstrates the importance of building knowledge from each other's experiences with particular reference to regional integration processes occurring in Asia and Europe. The Canberra workshop revolved around key questions such as "What can Australia learn from the EU or Asian integration?" "What could Europe and Asia learn from each other?" "How do we understand the drivers of integration and regionalism?" "How do ideas, norms and visions shape region-building?"

The focus of our deliberation was timely given the local context. In September 2011, the then Prime Minister Julia Gillard commissioned a White Paper for Australian domestic and international policy. The resulting document, "Australia in the Asian Century" was released in October 2012 and confirmed the strategic importance of the Asian region for Australia's future prosperity. Similarly, the EU has a longstanding relationship with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and is determined to strengthen its bonds with the countries in the region. This commitment was reaffirmed during the 9th Asia-Europe Meeting Summit (ASEM) hosted by Laos in November last year. Established 17 years ago, the original goals of ASEM were to maintain and enhance peace and stability and to promote sustainable economic and social development. Australia's formal inclusion in ASEM in 2010 further signals the significance of the relationship between Europe and Asia and its influence in Oceania.

In the same spirit, the ANU Centre for European Studies dedicated the year of 2012 to Asia with the aim of promoting a "triangular dialogue" between Europe, Asia and Australia. This special issue of *AEJ* is one of the many outcomes from that programme of activities.

The contributions in this volume can be divided into two approaches to the triangle. The first examines regional and subregional cooperation and integration processes through comparative lenses. While Europe has more experience in building supra-national structures that bring various national interests together to develop frameworks for action and solidarity, Asian countries have demonstrated rates of development that are much more significant than in Europe in recent years. Yet, both Europe and Asia are struggling with the challenge of economic and social inequality, resulting from uneven patterns of economic growth. Hence, determining appropriate policy initiatives to achieve greater equity is paramount in Europe and Asia as well as in Australia. How do these points of divergence as well as commonality influence the basis of dialogue? Elisabetta Nadalutti's essay seeks to generate new thinking by applying the concept of cross-border governance comparatively to Europe and Southeast Asia. The geographical zones analysed in her article are the borders between Italy and Slovenia and the Indonesia-Malaysia-Singapore growth triangle. Based on her knowledge of European programmes, she shows how cross-border cooperation in both Europe and Southeast

Asia can transform the space of state activity since it moves economic and political governance beyond the traditional national territorial containers of the nation-state. Danielle Tan's contribution is complementary to Nadalutti's approach as she takes the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS), one of the most dynamic regional cooperation configurations in mainland Southeast Asia, to examine how this open-ended, voluntary and networked (sub-)regionalism can help to break new ground with respect to practices and theories of regionalism. Focusing on institutions that aim to foster cooperation between Europe and Asia, Huong Le Thu offers an original contribution to our understanding of the Asia Europe Foundation (ASEF) and its role in the ASEM process by assessing its cultural objectives. She shows that despite the criticisms that ASEF faces—particularly with regard to its lack of coordination, leadership and vision—it still plays a crucial role as dialogue facilitator and represents an important space for building networks and drawing attention to the values and expertise that Asia and Europe have to offer each other.

The second approach investigates European reforms in the fields of finance, health care system, and elections to highlight the problems as well as the lessons that could be learned for Europe, Asia and Australia. The contributions examine the potential for shared values and their diffusion across the globe. Shaun Elder questions whether the global financial crisis, which has been a dramatic change agent for financial regulatory models and approaches in Europe, provides lessons for Asia. Karel Cada's essay offers an interesting case study of reforms in the Czech Republic and provides insights into how health care consumers are being constructed in neo-liberal policies. The research provides evidence of the ways in which the neo-liberal discourses of choice and responsibility shape and produce regulatory frameworks. Last but not least, Dorothy Horsfield offers a reading of Vladimir Putin's government in post-Soviet Russia within a context of increased freedom of expression and the rise of democratic aspirations among its people. She challenges the conventional view that Putin's ascendancy marks a return to authoritarianism and a retreat from democratic principles. What lessons do Russia offer the Asia/Europe/Australia triumvirate? Grounded in European case studies, this section of the publication offers food for thought for both Asian and Australian policy makers and scholars interested in moving towards the next step of regionalism within the Asia-Pacific region.

Taken together, the articles collected here exemplify the spirit of Erasmus Mundus in promoting the free exchange of knowledge that is at once intellectually rigorous yet steeped in respect for cultural diversity. The authors have benefited greatly from travel to a different region and milieu and the opportunity afforded by this distance to review and refine the focus of their analysis. We hope that you get a sense of the esprit de corps and scholarship that has characterised the EU-Oceania Erasmus Mundus experience while reading this publication.

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