

After nearly nine years in print, we felt the *Newsletter* needed a facelift. We also took the opportunity to change the layout by dropping the regional designations and categorizing articles according to type. On a practical level, which perhaps more appropriately reflects the diversity of research being undertaken in Asian Studies, it was becoming increasingly more difficult to decide where to place certain articles that defied our regional structure – research on Asians living in England, Asian art exhibitions in Europe, how Arabs perceive Asians, and the Japanese automobile industry in Europe are but a few examples. We are also not shying away from looking at how current, and even political, events affect research. Koen De Ceuster, Stephan van Galen, Mark Meulenbeld, Kristy Phillips, and Guita Winkel launched the idea of making academic work in and on Afghanistan the focus of this issue's theme section. It would give researchers concerned with the region an opportunity to reach a broader audience to discuss, among other things, the impact of world events on their work. I later invited Ellen M. Raven (see p.16) to join the project, together with whom I worked many a late evening here at the IAS up until the day we went to print. Her knowledge on the art and archaeology of Afghanistan and her dedication to the section profoundly influenced its eventual shape and character. On behalf of the editorial board as well as myself, I would like to thank Ellen for the incredible amount of inspiring energy and enthusiasm she lent to the under taking. - **Tanja Chute**

A Word about the EC's New Document, Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership

Director's
note >

The Commission has often stressed Asia's importance for the EU – whether economically, politically or culturally, or in relation to regional and global challenges such as poverty, environmental degradation, or democracy and human rights. However, it is difficult to deny that Europe's interest in Asia predominantly lies in the economic and political/strategic domains. For some time I have had the impression that everything not directly pertaining to these domains is considered subordinate to the Union's main interests: money and influence.



By Wim Stokhof

This preference is already clearly demonstrated on the first page of the EC's first communication *Towards a New Asia Strategy* published in 1994: "by the year 2000 one billion Asians will have significant consumer spending power and of these, 400 million will have average disposable incomes as high, if not higher, than their European or US contemporaries" (1994:1). Somewhat further on it is stated that "the Union needs as a matter of urgency to strengthen its economic presence in Asia in order to maintain its leading role in the world economy. This increase of the relative weight of Asia in the world economy will considerably reinforce the political weight of this region on the intellectual political scene. To keep Europe in its major role on the world stage, it is imperative to take account of the emergence of these new Asian Powers" (1994:1).

In the recently published document by the Commission, entitled *Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership* (2001), we find the same approach to Asia. The core objective of this document, which can be considered the overall strategic framework for Europe's relations with

Asia in the coming decade, is defined as follows: "Strengthening the EU's political and economic presence across the region (i.e. Asia), and raising it to a level commensurate with the growing weight of an enlarged EU" (2001:2).

In my opinion, this straightforward definition clearly illustrates the quintessence of the Commission's Asia Strategy; it seems to be drafted from a Euro-centric point of view – the economic and political/strategic interests of the Union prevail. Other dimensions – for instance, the cultural domain – are once again not mentioned at all.

In order to achieve its core objective, the Commission formulated a set of six general objectives and priorities. Unfortunately, the paper is very brief in explaining the core objective per se or the relationship between it and the set of general objectives considered to be instrumental in achieving the central aim: strengthening the EU's political and economic presence across the region, etc. In fact, this set of objectives very much resembles a shopping list, or a list of good intentions, to please as many readers (Europeans and Asians) as possible. The selection criteria, or even their cohesion, for that matter, are not always obvious and, sometimes, they seem only partly compatible with the core objective, and at other times even counterproductive. The six general objectives have been actualized into "concrete action points" defined by the specific conditions of the four pertinent sub-regions (South Africa, Southeast Asia, Northeast Asia and Australasia [sic]) and of the region as a whole.

On this page is a list of the six general objectives and priorities; each

objective is followed by what the EC calls 'concrete action points' in the political, economic and social dimensions. They are intended to be relevant for the region as a whole.

As I said, the proposed instruments to implement the general objectives to achieve the core objective do not always seem the most appropriate. For instance, enhancing the Union's economic and political presence in the region will not in certain countries easily combine with the Union's intention to lobby for human rights and good governance.

Promoting the use of the Euro internationally while, at the same time, promoting the development of less prosperous countries of the region will probably raise some questions in Asian quarters; the same can be said about the Commission's intention to try to safeguard the global environment together with its Asian partners.

With respect to the sub-regions, the Commission's definition of Asia – defined as an area extending from Afghanistan to Japan and from China to New Zealand, plus all points in between – is quite controversial. The inclusion of Australia and New Zealand is unusual. I agree with David Camroux (*EIAS Bulletin* 5 (10/11):4) that the EC's proposal to invite those two countries to become Asian Members will only dilute the ASEAN process. I do not agree with him that South Asia should be excluded – the subcontinent's problems will undoubtedly complicate the ASEM process, but a billion Asians can not be ignored.

Actually, we would have expected a more elaborate and overall balanced

vision from the Commission on Asia-Europe relations. On their position in a tripolar world, more reflections on such an extremely complex and diverse region as Asia is, on the relations between the states, considered to belong to Asia and their growing interdependence.

Without going into the many more points that need to be made, positive as well as negative ones, I'll restrict myself to two further important observations:

The first concerns ASEAN (the Association of Southeast Asian Nations). In the Commission's recent communication, India, Japan, and China are given special emphasis; however, the Southeast Asian countries are lumped together. I sense a tendency in Brussels to underestimate the use of bilateral relations between the EU and the individual Southeast Asian countries, and, indeed, even a certain doubt about the efficaciousness of the regional groupings/regional multi-lateral constructions ASEAN or ARF (ASEAN Regional Forum). At the moment, ASEAN can not realistically be expected to play a crucial role in shaping a new regional order. Its member states are trying to cope with another grave economic

continued >

Attention! >

Important Message to Subscribers:

Your subscriber's information has been included in our database. As this database needs to be updated regularly, we will be sending you a print-out of your information with our next issue, Number 28, which will be released this summer. Upon receipt of this form, we kindly request you to check these data and fill in any alterations and/or additions on the enclosed mutation form. Thank you in advance for your cooperation. < Kind regards, IIAS

Erratum >

In IIAS Newsletter 26, p. 23, Kathleen Taylor, author of the book under review "Sir John Woodroffe, Tantra, and Bengal: An Indian Soul in a European Body?", is referred to throughout the body of the text as Kathleen Turner. We apologize for the error.



IIAS
International Institute for Asian Studies

The International Institute for Asian Studies is a postdoctoral research centre based in Leiden and Amsterdam. The main objective of the IIAS is to encourage Asian Studies in the Humanities and the Social Sciences (ranging from linguistics and anthropology to political science, law, environment and development studies) and to promote national and international cooperation in these fields. The IIAS was established in 1993 on the initiative of the Royal Netherlands Academy of Arts and Sciences, Universiteit Leiden, Universiteit Amsterdam, and the Free University Amsterdam. It is financed mainly by the Netherlands Ministry of Education, Culture, and Sciences.

Based in the Netherlands, the Institute acts as an (inter)national mediator, bringing various parties together for the enhancement of Asian Studies. In keeping with the Netherlands' tradition of transferring goods and ideas, the IIAS works as a clearing-house of knowledge and information. This entails activities such as providing information services, constructing an international network, and setting up international cooperative projects and research programmes. In this way, the IIAS functions as a window on Europe for non-Europeans and contributes to the cultural rapprochement between Asia and Europe.

Research fellows at a post-PhD level are temporarily employed by or affiliated to the Institute, either within the framework of a collaborative research programme, or on an individual basis. The IIAS organizes seminars, workshops, and conferences, publishes a newsletter (circulation approximately 22,000 copies), and has established a database which contains information about researchers and current research in the field of Asian Studies within Europe and worldwide. A *Guide to Asian Studies in Europe*, a printed version of parts of this database, was published in 1998. The Institute also has its own server and Internet site to which a growing number of Institutes related to Asian Studies is linked.

Since 1994 the IIAS has been appointed to run the secretariat of the European Science Foundation Asia Committee (Strasbourg). Together with the Committee, the IIAS shares the objective of improving the international cooperation in the field of Asian Studies (additional information can be acquired at the IIAS).

In 1997 the Strategic Alliance for Asian Studies was established: an international cooperation between the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies (NIAS), Copenhagen, and the IIAS. The Institute of Asian Affairs (IfA), Hamburg, the European Institute for Asian Studies (EIAS), Brussels, and the Asia-Europe Centre (AEC) have since joined the Alliance. The Asia Alliance was set up to enhance research on (contemporary) Asia and to create networks in Asia and Europe with academic and non-academic institutions and actors.

Upon the initiative of the IIAS, and in close cooperation with NIAS, the Programme for Europe-Asia Research Links (PEARL) was established in Seoul in October 1998. It is a network of researchers from Asia and Europe, i.e. from the ASEM (Asia-Europe Meetings) member countries, representing leading Asian and European Studies institutes. PEARL believes that promotion of Asia-Europe research cooperation ought to be an integral part of the ASEM dynamics. The IIAS provides the secretariat for PEARL. <