The European Union: Challenges and Achievements

The EU Centre in Singapore and NUS FASS Office of Programmes Short Essay Competition 2013

Anthology of Selected Essays
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**Acknowledgments**
Foreword

In August 2013, the European Union Centre in Singapore, in conjunction with the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences at the National University of Singapore, jointly organized a short essay competition. The theme of the competition, ‘The European Union: Challenges and Achievements’ required the participants to respond to one of two questions:

(1) What do you see as the main achievements of the EU? Offer some ideas on what Singapore and ASEAN can learn from this.

OR

(2) What do you see as one of the main challenges facing the EU? Offer some recommendations as to how the challenge could be met.

Background

The European Union began as the European Coal and Steel Community in 1952 and formally established in its current state in November 1993. It has seen landmark achievements, promoting peace and reconciliation in Europe, extended European citizenship rights, strong human rights protection, and experimented with a bold monetary union. Nevertheless, 21st century events such as the Eurozone crisis, global trade stalemate in the WTO, immigration and the re-emergence of far-right and Eurosceptic parties pose significant challenges for the EU in the decades ahead.

In view of the challenges ahead, the short essay competition required participants to offer their perspectives on the future of the EU as well as its implications for Singapore and ASEAN. Participants were also encouraged to submit their essays in creative forms of expression, which helped to frame issues surrounding the EU in a more interesting way. A wide spread of essays was received, and the prize-winners were invited to participate in a dialogue with H.E. Dr. Michael Pulch, Ambassador of the EU to Singapore. Essays by the three prize-winners are featured in this anthology, alongside twelve other exemplary submissions which we would like to share. The views expressed in these essays are those of the authors and do not necessarily reflect the views of the EU or the EU Centre in Singapore.

About this Anthology

As the EU-Singapore relationship goes from strength to strength, the timing of last year’s essay competition could not have been more opportune. Just as business and economic ties between Singapore and the EU have grown more robust, people-to-people interactions have also flourished. Central to ensuring the continued success of the EU-Singapore relationship is for young people in Singapore to develop a healthy awareness of our interdependence and understand more about the EU. This anthology is divided into four sections, the first section containing the winning entries and the rest of the selected essays are classified under Creative Writing, Commentaries and Poetry. I hope you will find the essays in this anthology instructive yet illuminating.
Winning Submission
Lim Ye Jie
NUS School of Business

Part I: The Problem

It all began in two double-oh nine
Europe was laden with debt
First it was Greece
Then it was Spain
And the rest came after that

How it started wasn’t too clear
But it went something like that
The banks freely lent
The governments spent
Until it became really bad

So austerity measures soon began
The economies started to shrink
There was negative growth
Unemployment rose
Europe was left on the brink

Internal troubles then ensued
The Greeks started their protests
‘Austerity’s out!’
They proclaimed with a shout
There was mass social unrest

Even wealthy Germany wasn’t spared
Sending cash they could do without
Some Germans were enraged
So much that they said
‘If they default then kick them out!’

Internal squabbles were common
Government heads were replaced
First out was Berlusconi
And then Sarkozy
All were left with a bitter taste

The ‘debt crisis’ as it is now known
It exposed Europe’s weak side
A common currency
It sounds good, definitely
Yet there still exists a divide

The European countries, they disagree
On how the debt should be repaid
Though there’s ECB
But with bureaucracy
Decisions are not easily made

Some think austerity is the way
Some say spending should increase
‘If we don’t create jobs,
Our GDP will drop,
So let us do what we please’

The challenge ahead for the EU is
‘How can they ever agree?’
Or even if they do not
They should give it a shot
At making all countries happy

Part II: The Solution

Although a current framework exists
I believe there’s a need for review
For the crisis has shown
And it is well known
That it’s not always clear what to do

The Eurozone currently includes
Seventeen nations, as of today
It should be clear to see
For everybody
What they must do to stay

Standards should be imposed
Limiting each country’s debt
‘Cause they should know
Everyone plays a role
In meeting the standards they set

Regulations should be tightened
Banks should be scrutinised
We must ask why
If leverage is high
Or there’ll be a rude surprise

But all that’s for the future
Most are still in recession now
Only recently
France and Germany
Made EU growth positive somehow

Recovery will take some time
And will probably be quite painful
But to save the EU
Here’s what they should do
Create jobs for the unemployed pool

There’s also the infrastructure
Make it attractive to invest
And like Singapore
They should ship in more
Talent among the world’s best

Austerity is still important but
What needs to be spent should be spent
Keynes was right
The future is bright
If we properly invest every cent

To sum up Europe in two verses
I’d say there’s still potential
Through good times and bad
They always adapt
There is hope for the EU still

What they do need is to unite
And leverage on each other’s strengths
‘Cause that’s the basis upon
Which the EU was formed
Achieving more through joining hands

Competition winner Mr. Lim Yejie receives his certificate from Dr. Michael Pulch, Ambassador of the European Union to Singapore
The 2nd prize went to Ms. Vina Jie-Min Prasad, who wrote on the freedom of movement in the EU and the protection of the environment through the format of a letter to the EU by a long-tailed shrike;

First Runner-up
Vina Jie-Min Prasad
NUS Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

Dear European Union,

As a long-tailed shrike, part of the illustrious bird family Laniidae, I would like to congratulate you on your achievements regarding travel between countries, promoting inter-country cooperation, cultural preservation, and environmental protection! They have served as a great inspiration to many birds in Singapore, and I feel that Singapore and ASEAN can learn from your excellent example!

I admire how the European Union has been able to implement the Schengen Area among many of its member states, a factor which has greatly enhanced freedom of movement within the European Union and beyond. Every time I read the list of fundamental rights guaranteed by the European Union, particularly the right for the free movement of persons, I feel like chirping out loud with glee! When I heard the news that ASEAN was planning to set up an ASEAN common visa along the lines of the Schengen system, I was practically dancing on my favourite branch with joy! I certainly hope that more ASEAN countries will sign on to this plan in the near future, and that ASEAN will learn from the EU’s efforts to ensure ease of travel across borders, as I highly encourage human attempts to emulate the freedom of birds.

The Schengen Area proposal has succeeded due to the European Union’s mastery at promoting peaceful relationships between countries, thus fostering cooperation. A key example is the reconciliation between France and Germany — a factor behind the European Union winning the 2012 Nobel Peace Prize. While I leave the promotion of peace to my friends the doves, learning from the European Union would help curb internal feuds between ASEAN member states, such as the long-standing dispute between Thailand and Cambodia regarding the ownership of Preah Vihear Temple. As ASEAN is an organisation founded on mutual consultation and consensus, I feel that following the EU’s example of fostering amity between states would allow for more effective regional cooperation.
I also admire the European Union’s efforts to conserve Europe’s heritage sites through the European Union Prize for Cultural Heritage, also known as Europa Nostra. I have been particularly inspired by Europa Nostra’s efforts to promote community involvement in the conservation of cultural heritage sites, and have taken it upon myself to maintain the nest of one of my ancestors, who is known among our community for his python-slaying exploits. I have even tweeted about my future plans to conserve the nest, which you can read about on my Twitter account, @RufusTheShrike. Singapore can also learn from the EU’s example — many of my sparrow and mynah friends have been alarmed by Singapore’s plan to construct a highway through Bukit Brown cemetery. It will be a great loss if Bukit Brown were to go, as it would diminish the tangible weight of history that one can experience by hopping through the lallang grass (or walking, as the case might be) and observing the carvings on the gravestones. I feel that Singapore has a lot to learn from the EU in this respect — conservation, rather than demolition, will enable future generations of Singaporean birds and humans to appreciate their nation’s history.

Finally, on a more personal note, I appreciate the EU’s efforts in the field of wildlife conservation. The EU’s habitats and birds directives have allowed native populations of birds and other animals to make a comeback in the last few decades, and have also aided in the conservation of endangered species such as the Ortolan Bunting and the Scops owl. I am particularly enthusiastic about this cause, as I often fly over to Chek Jawa to enjoy the sea breeze, observe the marine life, and have lively chats with my fish-owl and hornbill friends. It would be a terrible shame if the land were to be reclaimed in the near future to build a road link to the Singaporean mainland, as it would deny Singaporean birds and humans the privilege of experiencing wildlife in its natural, unaltered habitat. I hope that Singapore will learn from the EU’s achievement, and step up efforts to conserve Chek Jawa’s unique and diverse ecosystem.

In conclusion, emulating the European Union would produce beneficial results both locally and regionally, and I truly hope that both ASEAN and Singapore can learn from the European Union’s myriad of achievements. I congratulate you on your achievements, and wish you the best of luck in the future!

Yours sincerely,

Rufus, the Singaporean long-tailed shrike
(Lanius schach)

‘...following the EU’s example of fostering amity between states would allow for more effective regional cooperation’
Trading, peace and knowledge in ASEAN: Tips from the EU
14 October 2013

Second Runner-up
Lam Pak Nian
NUS Faculty of Law

Economic integration
One of the most visible EU successes is the internal market, with free movement of people, goods, services and capital within the community. The internal market imperative has been a stepping stone in opening a vast hinterland at the EU's doorstep.

ASEAN knows the economic benefits of economic partnership, with the current push for the ASEAN Economic Community by 2015. How should ASEAN get there? The EU method was to abolish trade barriers internally. ASEAN should do this, but should also not forget that its most important export markets lie outside the region. An inward-looking policy, regionally, would be disastrous. The Singapore experience, with its virtual lack of barriers to trade, is such a prime example of openness that the ASEAN Economic Community should be no protectionist ‘Fortress ASEAN’.

Peace
The EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012. While peace should never be taken for granted, the award is an important symbolic validation of EU efforts in the “advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy and human rights in Europe”.

Europe is wary of wars and conflicts, having had two world wars fought on its continent. ASEAN, on the other hand, is still youthful. Its nations, said to be “made from the mould of decolonisation”, may value nationalism and sovereignty more. Perhaps ASEAN should put that exuberance to peaceful dispute resolution. In the bigger scheme of things, why should territorial claims in the South China Sea divide a united ASEAN? Nations should learn to be good neighbours and treat one another with respect and dignity. After all, as the tumultuous domestic history of the region shows, the peace is hard-earned. Its honest, hardworking citizens therefore have no need for greater conflict and the governments of ASEAN owe it to them to see that through.

Knowledge-based society
The EU sees a knowledge-based society as the way to remain competitive and improve the lives of the people. In its effort to cut down barriers to education, various EU initiatives allow European citizens to study across borders with no extra cost or administrative hurdles.

Education has to be the bedrock of a peaceful and enlightened society. As the saying goes, knowledge is power. Reciprocal educational arrangements within ASEAN will promote valuable research, academic exchange and cultural understanding. It is not merely about exchange programmes but must include academic cooperation, learning and practical application. Take a look at Singapore: it is mindful that its people are its only resource, and has built up strong universities with international links. This is the way to go. Singapore could spearhead such linkages for ASEAN. Enhancing the way the citizens of ASEAN learn, by also having an outward-oriented perspective, will ensure that the youth today are keenly aware global citizens and are equipped with the skills to find the solutions to tomorrow’s problems.

Footnotes:
1. A final year LLB student at the National University of Singapore who dreams of a better future while creating this infographic-style article for the 2013 FASS Office of Programmes Short Essay Competition. The moral rights of the author are asserted. This extracurricular piece of work is dedicated to Regina Mydin and Irene Caballot, without whom I would not have broadened my horizons from Singapore to Asia, the EU and the world.
3. Michael C. Hallman, “Fast Asian Economic Integration and Europe: Can ASEAN Learn from the EU?”
5. ONE ASEAN Research Study, Part Kim Bang, “Can ASEAN Still Learn from the European Union?”
7. Map modified from Addicted175, cited in Wikimedia
8. Sticker modified from Joseph Jus, cited in Openclipart
9. Dove modified from SeriousTux, cited in Openclipart
10. Vectorised ASEAN map cited in Wikimedia
Charu Roopha Srikanth
NUS Faculty of Building
School of Design & Environment

A Letter from Joseph Bech to Singapore
Dear Singapore,

My name is Joseph Bech. I am from Luxembourg, a country in Europe which is three times your size and has one-tenth of your population. I have been following you for a while now, watching you grow leaps and bounds. With this letter I intend to give you a few tips which are from my humbly eventful life.

Before I embark on giving you advice, let me tell you a little about myself.

I was born in 1887 in a small town called Diekirch in Luxembourg. I am a lawyer by profession. I love painting and art, and I was fascinated by the cine camera in my later life.

You must be thinking “what can a guy who was born in the 19th century tell me that I don’t know now?” Well, the problem with today’s generation is that you guys have all of human history at your fingertips yet the lessons of them are not learnt. Here are my lessons.

Lesson 1:
Don’t put all your steel in one basket
Luxembourg was an upcoming country, like yours is now. In 1921, when I became the prime minister of the country, I was dealt with a weak economy and strong neighbours (Germany, Belgium and France). In 1926, the global financial crisis struck us hard; at that time all of our exports were mainly with Germany, our main trading partner. During that crisis, I identified that one should never be dependent on one country alone. So what I did was to approach Belgium and Netherlands, to seek closer economic ties and facilitate exchange of Luxembourg’s main export, steel.

Lesson 2:
If there is a bully, there is also another weak kid like you
In 1940, when Germany invaded Luxembourg and I was forced to seek asylum in London, I learnt another lesson. When you are small and surrounded by bullies, look for other allies. That’s what I did; I signed the Benelux treaty with Belgium and Netherlands.

Lesson 3:
Make yourself indispensable
After the war ended, I decided that the only safety I was going to get was making myself indispensable for other countries. I convinced the Benelux union to join West
Germany, France and Italy in 1951. The union was called “European coal and steel community (ECSC)”. Its intention was to create a common market for coal and steel thus making war “materially impossible”. Just to be on the safe side, I managed to locate the Headquarters of the High Authority of the ECSC in Luxembourg. This ECSC is what you know now as the European Union.

**Lesson 4:**

*Be Proactive and think in the long term*

Doing all the above is good but not enough. Just to make sure of Luxembourg’s and Europe’s safety, I championed the need for a “European Defense community” which will have a common European army. It was unfortunately shot down by France. Undeterred, I chaired the Messina conference which led to signing of the Treaties of Rome. This led to the formation of the “European Economic community”.

I have represented Luxembourg in the formation of Benelux, United Nations and NATO, and there is one thing I can tell you. A single country individually trying to become the leader of a region will not sustain itself.

So, Singapore, though you have made remarkable progress within your country, you have to make increased efforts in bringing about regional community-building for a country never exists in vacuum. What is happening in the region now, will affect you in 5 years. So follow my lessons and be proactive. Use your existing skills to develop your region and make yourself indispensable.

Forget the nuances and technicalities of the European Union, but understand the reasons and the purpose of forming it. History is full of lessons. Make sure to learn the right ones.

**Regards,**

Joseph Bech (a concerned European)
Mrinalini Kaur Sapra

Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy

On the Common Agriculture Policy

“Hello, I am Sophie Richards and I am presently at the studios of GMER Television in Paris to understand the issues posed by the European Union’s Common Agricultural Policy – or CAP as it is called. One of the longest standing debates in the World Trade Organization has centred on the advantages enjoyed by European farmers which enable them to compete in the international market for agricultural commodities. If traditional economics posits that countries should produce according to their comparative advantage, then the continued presence of European farmers in the global food circuit warrants some scrutiny. Today, Dr Shankar of the India Research Institute and Dr Henri of the France Agriculture Economics Institute will be joining us to understand these issues further.”

“Dr Henri: why is the EU spending 40% of its budget on the agricultural sector, especially when it is not the most competitive? How can this ever begin to be justified?” asks Sophie while looking at Dr Henri, a distinguished French academician.

“Thank you Sophie. Now, you cannot treat agriculture like you treat any other sector. You can live without the Ipod, but you cannot live without food. Food security is crucial to our independence and survival. I agree there were excessive distortions in the market in the early years of the CAP, but we are now shifting to a simpler regime. There is also a special quality to our European products – for example, France alone with its varieties of wines and cheeses is one of the world leaders in maintaining its cultural uniqueness.”

Sophie looks concerned and asks “But Dr Henri, why are the taxpayers in the EU funding an industry where we cannot compete? People are losing their livelihood, can’t find jobs, but we still support agriculture. Shouldn’t we be moving away from this entitlement mentality towards the farmer?”

“Madam, I don’t think the issue should be viewed in this manner. You have grown up in the age of plenty and never seen war. You should ask your grandparents what it was like when there was food scarcity and we were dependent on others during the Great Wars. We are indebted to our brave French farmers who helped fight the Germans during the Occupation,” explains Dr Henri. “Farming is part of our history and the soul of France.”

“Dr Shankar, do you think it is fair to farmers in poor countries like India to compete with farmers in the EU?” asks Sophie. “There are apparently 600 million people in India that are involved in agriculture. I think that’s more than the population of the whole of the European Union!”
“Thank you Ms Sophie. I am extremely privileged to be here. Countries like India have a comparative advantage in food production. However our products never rise in value in the international market because of dumping being done by the EU countries. This is one of the chief causes of continuing poverty. It makes little sense to give money for aid to developing countries and then to take away their source of employment,” speaks Dr Shankar emotionally. “Your’ geographical indications’. Your ‘unique products’. Your ‘phytosanitary norms’. You think you are improving your situation? That your farmers are benefiting? Look at your economies. Greece is in turmoil – one of the largest beneficiaries of CAP.I cannot say the French are doing any better. For the past few years we in the developing world have been trying to get a better bargaining position at the WTO – but I’m afraid that the one solution – that the EU gives up the CAP and focus on other sectors – will never happen. You live in a fool’s paradise Dr Henri. The amount of environmental damage your unsustainable farming has done is only beginning to be measured. Only the future can tell what will happen.”

Sophie turns to the camera and says “Is EU’s farming policy sustainable and fair? A lot of questions were raised today and I’d like to thank our distinguished panellists for their contributions. To the audience at home, please stay tuned for our next exciting program! Au revoir!!”

The farming industry in India has not advanced as quickly as other sectors of the economy. Coupled with intense competition from EU producers, agriculture’s share of India’s GDP has declined.
Image source: http://www.treehugger.com/green-food/can-india-achieve-food-security.html
With a disdainful look, Germany flicked the single breadcrumb off his impeccably ironed suit with an impeccably manicured nail. Not even bothering to change his expression, he turned his gaze back to the shabbily dressed man sitting opposite him at the small table of the café. Greece had his eyes downcast, focusing on the cup he was holding onto with both his hands. Only the slightest rippling of tea betrayed his building anxiety.

A stack of papers rested at the centre of the wooden table. The top sheet bore the familiar yellow and blue emblem of the club to which the two men belonged. Both were deeply involved in club matters – all members were. When all was well and every member cooperated and kept to the charter rules, everyone benefited hugely from the arrangement. But if even just one or two misbehaved…

“Herr Greece,” said Germany after an extended silence, “my schedule is full and I am not one for empty pleasantries. You are, undoubtedly, aware of why I have arranged this meeting…”

“Germany…” began Greece, spreading out his arms for an embrace, “Good, magnanimous, brother Germany, I–”

“–will explain yourself fully,” said Germany briskly. “This is more than some minor infraction of accountability. This is a breach of basic integrity.”

“Brother Germany…?”

“You have mishandled your money, doctored your digits, falsified your finances,” said Germany, as he steepled his fingers and leaned back against his chair. “You have lied to us, Herr Greece, and now you find yourself in amount of debt.”

“B-brother Germany, know that I meant every word of my apology during the general meeting!” Greece cried out. “From the very beginning, not a single day has gone by without my deeply regretting my actions.”

“Really? How convenient it is that this regret only moved you to confession after our Eurostat accountants uncovered the discrepancies.”

The air froze and the temperature in the café dropped a few degrees, and Greece wilted under Germany’s accusatory stare, scarcely daring to breathe another word. The tension thickened as the silence wore on. It was Germany who finally broke it.

“Under the contract terms,” said Germany, tapping an impatient finger on the stack of papers, “you will be granted your loan…”

“Oh thank you, oh merciful–”

“… but only on the condition that you agree to budget cuts, the selling of non-essential property, and a restructuring of your grossly inefficient work methodology,” continued Germany. He arched a fussily trimmed eyebrow. “Do you accept these terms?”

“Yes!”

“Good. Then I expect that you will be true to your word this time.”

Timothy Kwok offered one of the popular narratives in the aftermath of the Eurozone debt crisis.
Germany reached into his coat and pulled out a small leather case, which he then opened and placed on the table. A solitary fountain pen the colour of blackest onyx rested on the case’s scarlet interior. The pen’s silver tip glinted off the sunlight streaming in from the window. Greece’s eyes followed the piece of stationery as Germany casually shifted the case towards him.

“I assume you’ve had sufficient time to read through your copy,” said Germany. “We have already supplied our signatures. You will sign on the dotted lines below pages six, ten and sixteen.”

The soft sounds of the shuffling and scratching of paper could be heard in the quiet of the empty café, as Greece hurriedly flipped through the document and scribbled down his name. When he was finished, Greece looked up from the papers and extended his hand towards Germany. Germany reached out to shake it, and immediately felt the firm, steady grip of an honest man’s handshake. They let go.

This time, there were no profuse expressions of gratitude, no extravagant but empty praises from Greece. He simply quietly stood up from his chair, gave a small bow and left.

A while later, Germany was on the phone with France.

“Monsieur Germany, is it finished? Has he signed it?” asked the anxious voice from the receiver.

“Yes. He has just left,” replied Germany, in-between sips of his coffee. “Herr Greece seemed genuinely repentant.”

“Oh? But Monsieur Greece was always a slippery one…” France reflected. “I’d have thought you would advocate a firmer stance against our less disciplined members. You believe he will hold his end of the agreement, then?”

Germany took a long sip to finish up the remainder of his drink before responding.

“No.”

“No…?”

“Firstly, as you have said, Herr Greece has been deceiving us for years,” said Germany. “And secondly, he has just walked off with my €650 pen.”
Yeo Jun Yan used the format of a short story about an apartment block and its neighbours as an analogy of the challenges of overcoming the effects of the Eurocrisis in the EU.

Yeo Jun Yan

NUS Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences

The Neighbours

Mutti stared outside the window. The weather might have turned calm but dark clouds are still looming. The conceited weathermen, in the television set playing behind her, discussed the possibility of another storm as the soft rays of the sun passed through the perforations in the clouds.

Her focus switched to the road that stretched from her shared apartment. The wide road was initially built for the anticipated heavy traffic that never came. Most people entering and leaving the apartment only walked on one side of the road. Perhaps it was the cracks and puddles on the other side that confined people to a single side of the road. Those defects have been identified almost four years ago. Efforts to fix the problems have been positive as the road became smoother overall. Some in the apartment thought that many have already became a habit to rely on one side of the road.

Looking at these defects, it will constantly trigger the memory of how one of the tenants in the unit initially tried to conceal it. She is a member of the quartet who cynics in the neighbourhood called “PIGS”. Today, wearing her white dress with blue horizontal strips, she sits at a corner of the unit that she shares with 17 others including Mutti. Unemployed since that incident, she has promised to make some money next year.

Meanwhile, due to this issue, some of John’s children - their next-door neighbours - have been talking about moving out for some time. Over afternoon teas, John mentioned how living on the same floor has badly affected his lifestyle. Although John still wanted to be an active neighbour as part of the closely knitted community, certain communal activities were just not suited for him.

Leaving is in fact not a viable option for all who chose to live together in the same unit and the same floor. What will people say about the community if one were to leave in times of crisis? What will happen to the future progression of the community? What if everyone, who has a problem, left just because their collective efforts are not working in the short term? Once a tenant has signed on the dotted line, there is no room for regrets. Perhaps the hope for a change of weather can be realised through fully utilising the strengths of the shared space. Labour shall be divided
accordingly. With unlocked rooms, everyone can move around the floor freely and choose wherever the conditions suit their work the best (Dammann 2013). This will result in efficiency as everyone on the same floor can realise their work potential and everyone’s work can be valued on an equal basis.

On the other hand, the neighbours have the opportunity to choose if they want to participate in certain activities, as they are after all neighbours. However, if the neighbour is able to help the others, there is no reason why he or she should not. This will allow them to get a chance to play a leadership role in the community - instead of isolating themselves, they should take advantage of the fact that they are all living on the same floor (Economist 2012).

References:


Amanda Chan

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The Euro and the Single Market: Lessons for ASEAN

Although not every member of the EU has adopted the single currency, the creation of the euro has thus far been the most visible expression of solidarity and the most powerful symbol of integration in Europe. To date, 18 members of the EU and 6 non-EU countries have adopted the euro – that in itself is a laudable achievement, given the gargantuan administrative and logistical processes involved. While the ongoing Eurozone crisis has time and again brought into question the sustainability of a single currency, the past decade of convenience enjoyed and savings accrued ought not to be dismissed.

Another praiseworthy achievement – yet perhaps taken for granted by many – is the EU’s role in ensuring that war is “not only unthinkable but materially impossible” for the past decades. Arising from the political realities of the Cold War era, international security had been, and still is, one of the organization’s top priorities. One of its main tenets of achieving peace and security is through development and poverty reduction, and it has since given much political and financial support for local solutions to wide-ranging local problems in developing regions like Asia and Africa.

Many of the best lessons are learnt through pain, and this lesson is derived from the ongoing Eurozone crisis. In times of stability, cooperation is possible in a regional organization as long as most members stand to gain. In times of instability, however, the self-interest of each country necessitates that they become less inclined to cooperate unless the benefits of cooperation are obvious to its people, or far outweighs the costs of doing so. This is when a conflict-resolution mechanism becomes extremely important, and especially so for ASEAN given the numerous interstate conflicts inherited from the past and the potentially volatile situation in the South China Sea. Moving forward, the goal of a common market by 2015 would make such a mechanism all the more imperative as greater interaction within this group of culturally diverse countries at different stages of economic development will almost invariably lead to clashes.

The EU’s achievements could only have been realized with functional institutions to support its complex structure. Even though the ASEAN way of informal consultations and backroom negotiations have thus far been sufficient, it is likely that the organization will need to institutionalize more formal procedures as it grows bigger and more complex. The sense of predictability that comes with institutionalization can help to reassure the leaders of ASEAN countries, many of whom are
still bogged down by baggage from colonial
times and whose suspicion of others’
intentions can prohibit productive cooperation.
This is perhaps an area that Singapore, as the
more advanced country amongst its Asian
neighbours, can actively play the role of a
leader to formalize processes and build
institutions that will form the foundations for a
more integrated Asia.

A final caveat: what has worked for the EU
does not necessarily work for ASEAN. The
lessons aforementioned are broad-based
suggestions applicable in view of ASEAN’s
long-term agenda of regional integration, but
the relevance and for more specific lessons to
be learnt (especially when concerned with the
approach to achieve integration), there is need
for more dedicated research and in-depth
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Chew Yiliang

NUS School of Engineering

Maintaining the Energy Edge

As a regional group, the European Union (EU) has one of the world’s most comprehensive energy policies. Aiming to diversify energy supplies, the EU has been heavily involved in the development of renewable energy and has been one of the world’s leaders. The shift towards renewable energy ties in closely with the European Climate Change Programme, which deals with environmental protection from different perspectives, including water, waste and air management. In addition to being one of the signatories to the Kyoto Protocol and setting up one of the most comprehensive greenhouse gas emission trading schemes, the EU has actively pursued policies to set targets and promote active participation of its member countries. As a combined statement from a regional bloc, this is an encouraging commitment. However, challenges remain to conceive a comprehensive energy policy that can meet the needs of all member states.

The aim is to achieve a 20% renewable energy generation by 2020. However, the percentage has yet to reach 10%. Across the different countries, the share of renewable energy ranges from almost 1% in Malta to over 45% in Sweden. Thus, one of the greatest challenges would be regarding the sharing of expertise between member states. This issue is made complicated by countries that are having difficulty entering the common EU energy market, including Bulgaria and Greece. The common EU market is aimed at bringing together different information and creating opportunities for data collection and energy transfer between countries. Renewables in the

As conventional energy sources run low, EU nations lead the way in harnessing renewable energy – from tidal power in Holland to wind energy in France.
Image source: http://www.fermeng.ie/services/renewable-energy/

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EU includes biofuels, geothermal, solar photovoltaic and thermal, wave, wind energy as well as hydrogen fuel in vehicles. Sharing of expertise is essential for development because of the immense potential of renewables. Based on estimates, the potential for wind energy in the EU is three times of the total energy demand. In addition, another positive sign is the strong support from the public. Recognising the potential, Lithuania is modelling its wind energy programme after its neighbour, Denmark.

The European Renewable Energy Council represents the European Renewable industry, focusing on the sharing of research and discussion with various stakeholders at various levels. This is crucial as it means that the industry is represented at a regional level helping to chart the path towards the policy goals. However, there is still a need to ensure that these measures are translated to actions on the ground as well. A further look at the statistics shows a huge difference in energy generation involving solar and wind for Germany, which is one of the leaders, against Latvia. For example, a high percentage of Malta’s and Slovakia’s energy also comes from oil and natural gas, which are traditional fossil fuel sources.

With the appropriate policies, this shift is a realistic objective, as illustrated by Portugal. Different sets of policies in the early 21st century has set the path from development of different forms of energy, including wind, solar and tidal wave power in the subsequent years, and achieving more than a 100% increase. However, every member state is unique. To effectively model its renewable policy programme, the EU should recognize and analyse the potential for development of different forms of renewable energy. Moving away from the one-sized-fiy-s-all approach, Lithuania with its large biomass reserves has the potential to develop the bioenergy sector to become one of the leaders in the EU.

In spite of the developments, the greatest challenges are still balancing policy interests with corporate interests and handling concerns of different countries. Besides the issue of energy subsidies, the public-private debate also deals with other concerns such as costs on businesses and other government investment and financing measures. In addition, the Commission has to deal with different opinions by different countries on the level of intervention. While UK favours a single greenhouse gas emission reduction target, Poland does not want ambitious targets to be set. Under Angela Merkel’s leadership, Germany also hopes that countries are given more flexibility to set their own agenda on energy policy.

Besides decreasing carbon emissions, the significance of this issue also relates back to energy self-sufficiency and decrease dependency on energy imports. For instance, more than 30% of oil and natural gas imports come from Russia. Furthermore, although nuclear energy is present as an energy source, less than 10% of uranium used is mined within Europe, with majority imported. While the process seems difficult, it is paramount that the EU maintains its active stance on the issue, and argue for change, in order to promote a global response to the subject of renewables and climate change.
No more wars

The European Union (EU) represents a remarkable ideal – that is, a historically diverse region has come together under a supranational authority. This has had the effect of making war between the member states of the EU virtually unthinkable – indeed well-nigh impossible – and is probably the greatest and most impressive achievement of the EU, offering lessons both in reconciling historical enmities, and ridding humanity of the scourge of war.

Historically, Europe has been a place marked by conflict and tensions. Indeed, for the period right until WW2, there has almost never been any prolonged period of peace, with one conflict or another always breaking out in various parts of Europe, some of which have been amongst the world’s bloodiest and most bitter, such as the Thirty Years War and the Napoleonic Wars. It is thus remarkable that in the post-WW2 world, European states decided to embark on the great political and economic experiment of European unity, investing the project with enough resources and authority to make it workable. Furthermore, this project of European unity is one accomplished under the auspices of democratic, independent nation-states acting out of their own free will, and for their own best interests, instead of being compelled to join such a body under coercion from a foreign conqueror. The result has been astonishing: There has been no war between the member-states of the European Communities, and later the EU, since its inception, and war is now unimaginable between them.

The EU has achieved this noble goal through gradual European integration. Starting with the European Coal and Steel Community, the EU has progressively integrated its economy, and the spill over effect into the areas of security and politics, to the extent that war amongst EU member-states is now unthinkable, because it would damage the aggressor as much as the victim. For instance, the aforementioned European Coal and Steel Community integrated and intertwined the respective coal and steel sectors of each national economy - economic sectors critical to production of war materiel. Indeed, the risk of war is so low that European states can even integrate elements of their military, such as through the Eurocorps. Thus, although armed forces still remain under national control, the EU has institutions that make the risk of war virtually non-existent.

In the context of Southeast Asia (SEA), this achievement is one that ASEAN should strive to emulate. War is destructive, and countries should be encouraged to avoid the use of force as a policy to resolve disputes with their neighbours. This is particularly so in Southeast Asia where, similar to Europe, is a politically and culturally diverse region, with many opportunities for conflict amongst the nation-states. One has only to examine its modern history post-decolonization to witness this. Despite the founding of ASEAN in 1967, Southeast Asian states still get involved in conflicts with each other. Most notable of such would be the recent Thai-Cambodia border disputes that have provoked skirmishes along the frontier, resulting in 41 deaths. That such
Conflicts can still break out between ASEAN members, especially with the involvement of a founding member of the organisation (Thailand), only goes to show the distance that ASEAN has yet to go to catch up with the EU in rendering violence inconceivable as a method of solving inter-state disputes.

Drawing from the lessons of the EU, perhaps the only sure-fire way to make war unthinkable in Southeast Asia would be greater integration of the region, not just economically, but politically as well. Of course, such integration would have to be incremental, and be driven by the political will of national leaders, and could emulate the historical EU pattern of first integrating the economies, and later on political institutions. However, a very high degree of trust is required for this to work, and also the willingness of SEA citizens to see themselves as part of a region with a regional identity, not just national ones.

In conclusion, the biggest achievement of the EU is its rendering of war unthinkable amongst its members. That this achievement took place in a region historically split by war - the bitterest of conflicts, at that - makes it all the more remarkable. This is certainly a great work that ASEAN should aspire to emulate.

In conclusion, the biggest achievement of the EU is its rendering of war unthinkable amongst its members. That this achievement took place in a region historically split by war - the bitterest of conflicts, at that - makes it all the more remarkable. This is certainly a great work that ASEAN should aspire to emulate. Indeed, the very success of the EU in doing this is an indication that the feat is not impossible, merely difficult. It is thus certainly within the capabilities of SEA governments to achieve it, if only the political will can be found.
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Where are you from?
-I am from Europe

Can you imagine a situation when people from France, Italy or Spain (which are considered as countries with a high level of nationalism) respond in that way? When I arrived in Singapore two months ago the first question most Singaporeans was “Where are you from?” It was common that they mistook Poland with Holland (because the names of the countries sound similar) and after that I had to explain where exactly Poland is. It was the first time I told myself that it would be much easier to say “I am from Europe”.

This essay is based on my own observations and experiences and presents my personal point of view. It is my third exchange programme (the previous ones were an Erasmus Exchange in Strasbourg and a student exchange in Warsaw). Although I have only been in Singapore for two months, I have already had the opportunity to explore Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand and I can say now that being European really means something. Our Union is based on specific values and this is the most important factor which distinguishes us from the ASEAN. I can imagine even British people saying “We are from Europe” but a Singaporean saying “I am from Southeast Asia” is most unlikely.

The main achievement of the EU is the interactions and integration of its people.

We stand on the values such as democracy and we base all decisions on human rights. On the contrary, ASEAN is just an economic union which concentrates decision on the development of its members.

The best example showing differences in integration between people from EU and ASEAN is comparing number of mix marriages. According to The Economist:

“Marriage between people of different backgrounds is one of the best barometers of social integration”

Personally, I have a lot of friends in Europe whose parents are of different nationalities. However, when I asked my Singaporeans friends if they could marry a Vietnamese or Malaysian, most of them say no. This answer astonished me as Singapore is proud to be a multicultural country where everyone is well integrated. However, the country seems to be still based on social clusters. If you think that I am not right just try to answer one question: how many Asian mix couples do you know? Not many, isn’t it? So how would you like to build a union if the members do not treat each other equally? In this case we have to

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1 The mixture as before. Mix marriages, Jul 6th 2012, 15:51 by J.P.
http://www.economist.com/blogs/feastandfamine/2012/07/mixed-marriages
distinguish between tolerance and integration. In my opinion, people from ASEAN are more tolerant within their population but they show less inclination to integrate with other nationalities in contrast to Europeans who are less tolerant but more eager to integrate with each other².

On the other hand, recently ASEAN noticed higher people satisfaction whereas scepticism about EU increases. This is because of economic development in ASEAN (per capita income in the region has raised from 2,267 U.S. dollars to 3,759 U.S. dollars in 2012³) whereas the EU is facing a serious financial crisis. According to the Guardian: “Figures from Eurobarometer, the EU’s polling organisation, analysed by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), a think-tank, show a decline in trust in the EU in countries such as Spain, Germany and Italy that are historically very pro-European⁴.”

To conclude, I believe that even the best integrated communities fail when the economy is going down and when they face financial problems. In my opinion, both EU and ASEAN can learn from each other. However, ASEAN leaders, especially those from Singapore, have to remember that a union is not a business

² comparison between numbers of stereotypes and numbers of mix marriages based on my own observations

and more focus should be placed on human rights and social integration.

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The EU’s Legitimacy Challenge

In terms of its institutional construction, Europe has made significant headway in the last 60 years. But do institutions translate into identity?

European integration has come a long way since the 1952 creation of the European Coal and Steel Community, heralded as “a first step in the federation of Europe”. Europe has achieved significant institutional milestones: the creation of a single market, the passport-free Schengen Area, a monetary union, and a common foreign and security policy. Moreover, for its contributions to "the advancement of peace and reconciliation, democracy, and human rights in Europe", the EU was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012.

However, academics studying the European Union have repeatedly stressed the “democratic deficit” of European institutions, in particular their lack of accountability and legitimacy. Scharpf noted the tension between the EU’s “input”, or process, legitimacy and its “output”, or performance, legitimacy, stating that in the case of the EU, both forms of legitimacy were facing serious challenges.

The EU has made significant headway in responding to its critics and improving the democratic quality of its institutions. In particular, the Treaty of Lisbon increased the powers of the European Parliament, enhanced the role of national parlaments in EU legislation, and granted EU citizens and residents the right to petition the European Parliament “on any matter which comes within the Union’s field of activity and which affects him, her, or it directly”.

Yet are institutional reforms sufficient to rebuild legitimacy?

Schmidt pointed out the existence of two dimensions of legitimacy: the institutional dimension and the constructivist, or discursive, dimension. Since perceptions, not just institutions, matter, it is not enough to have representative institutions if people do not feel they are representative.

It is thus time for the EU to concentrate on rebuilding its discursive legitimacy, and focus on the construction of a European identity. Yet this is easier said than done. Former Director-General of the WTO Pascal Lamy commented in 2012: “Communities are forged on national warrior myths. The myth of the homeland is a nation in danger. The problem of Europe is that it was born on a contra-myth, peace.”

Lamy’s point should be tempered with the understanding that the construction of a European identity has been exclusive. It begins by defining “Europe” and “Europeans” against a non-European “other”. It is perhaps not a coincidence that the rise of the nationalist far-right has paralleled European integration. Because Europe has traditionally been associated with a dominant culture and ethnic group, its constituent nation-states have struggled with the degree to which
“multiculturalism” should be promoted or indeed accepted.

Any form of European identity construction should rest on three pillars: education, language policy, and technology. Currently, the imagined community that is Europe is an elite-driven construct which has not fully entered the consciousness of the average EU citizen.

In terms of education, the EU’s role in a rapidly-evolving global context must be emphasised in schools, with the introduction of a common European history textbook for students following the successful Franco-German example, combined with the expansion of the Erasmus programme.

Regarding language policy, the EU should adopt a two-pronged approach. On the one hand, it should promote the learning of two foreign languages in school in every country. On the other hand, it should consider the use of a few dominant languages in official discussions rather than all 26 of them. This should be done with great sensitivity and with an appeal to pragmatism, for language has the ability to unite as much as to divide.

Finally, the EU should harness technology, especially social networks, to create a virtual European community, a space for debate and the exchange of ideas. This could be complemented by the efforts of private sector entrepreneurs, as was the case with Euronews. Dare one dream of a European Facebook or Twitter run by its own citizens?

Ultimately, the EU project has been, for too long, a top-down enterprise. EU citizens must take the initiative to start building Europe from the bottom up. The success or failure of the European project hinges not only on the will of political elites, but also on the support of European citizens. Europe will only be taken seriously as a geopolitical entity, and hold its own against other global powers, if it displays a sense of unity and a common purpose. Beyond the construction of democratic institutions, legitimacy can only exist when European citizens see themselves as co-owners and co-creators of the European dream.
Ang Huei Ting

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Natural Crevices for Foreign Labour to Fit Into

Travel documents clutched in hands, feet lunging forward
Forward across the borders yet still within the Schengen area
Area that I settle in for the sake of daily grind
to accumulate legal tender
Tender peril of losing my rice bowl for I am unentitled to equal opportune
Opportune is reserved for those born and raised on the same concrete

Easily noticeable is my discongruity in working as an offshore oil laborer
Laborer that negates labour shortage,
carelessly spilling words in the local language
Language of hybridity and attempts to blend in
In this city increasingly modified for cosmopolitan living
Living in a space with importation of myself and the services I employed in my hometown

Gradually my neighbours saw me as their own species
Species of one kind whose children had equal chance to go to school together
Together complementing assorted portions of the economy
Economy and land of ample room, lack of stifle that breeds discordance
Discordance even if present, is not allowed to be passed on to the next generation

I might not stay here for long
Long way back to home but it is mandatory
Mandatory too, for the familiarity of my secondary harbour to stay in my heart for eternity

And We Admire Them

We have comparable high population density in urban cities
Cities where we could have reaped economies of scale with aptly spaced infrastructure
Infrastructure that generates good money, not bad money derived from exploitation
Exploitation absurdities make us wonder
Wonder if we should have not deviated from our most basic humane values in this rat race

Practice of human rights form the base
Base for tangible social and cultural capital
Capital needed to achieve the elusive real development process
Chen Qijian

NUS School of Business

The winter of differences
A band of twenty eight
Each with their cause
To walk a road of dusk
While mired with rust

A few stand above the rest
Their might apparent for all
Yet cloaked within their breast
Weakness aplenty like the rest

The rest resigned to fate,
PIIGS, discontent and malaise
Riddled with debt and unrest
Since the cure burdens the masses

When some are shackled and bound
While others are free to soar
Not all can walk the same path
Austere that it burns them raw

The solution some says
To clip the wings of the best
While adding wind to the rest
Yet that is foolish and will crash

The road ahead to a brighter dawn
Depends on more than just acorns
Cohesiveness without the cost
Of lengthy debates without rest

Bonds that tie must have a point
A common currency wrecks that core
Forcing the weak against the wall
Squeezing them out for applause

It is easier said than done
To put apart differences of the past
To stand together and endure frost
Because some can’t stand the sun

Yet fundamentals never lie
Weakness of breath does make one cry
To strengthen confidence for one to try
Harness those companies and let them fly

To end this off, we stop the rhyme
The key question remains for us to mime
How do we value add for the world
Such that we find our relevance and stride

The road ahead to a brighter dawn
Depends on more than just acorns
Cohesiveness without the cost
Of lengthy debates without rest
Joan Khng

NUS Faculty of Arts & Social Sciences

The European Union, or EU for short, Has achieved well to inspire the thought: “What if Singapore and ASEAN could adopt this policy?”
W ould it create any unwanted controversy? Imagine the Member States of ASEAN being able to create A stable and competitive economic climate-- Joined together with one common aim: To work closely together envisioning the same Co-operation and peaceful co-existence Emphasizing stability and a mutual stance Of harmonious development for every single Membe r-
What an expression of solidarity we will all remember!

Rather than each country keeping to itself and feeling The need to edge each other out of any dealing. A common union amongst ASEAN would allow For a shared commercial policy to follow-Trade negotiations could be presented As a single group under the union’s respected Agreement to promote ASEAN’s image To the world that would give it an edge Over other non-unionized Western countries Thus ensuring ASEAN’s prosperity to last for centuries.

Perhaps a knowledge based society could be promoted, Where cross border training programmes could be mooted. Intercultural understanding could be fostered Through collaborative efforts to allow for students posted In educational exchanges to various Member States To be easily accredited at affordable rates, As partnerships would cut down on Any administrative barriers frowned upon.

There could also be better security partnerships As all Member States collaborate to prevent any slips In criminal activities and terrorism across the border So that overall there is justice in law and order. With the common goal of greater compatibility and convergence Among the various Member States’ legal systems.

The EU has also done well to protect health and environments Safeguarding the quality of life for future generations- If Singapore and ASEAN adopts their policy Perhaps there would be less haze as countries would have the courtesy To fight commonly on environmental issues, keeping consumers busy With making eco-friendly choices And ensuring we go beyond mere voices To sign international programmes and conventions That fight against the present and foreseeable environmental destructions.

What EU did was to create a free area Such that people can move freely within EU without fear, Allowing all citizens to have a similar passport,
So that travel across borders need not be fought-
No formality making it easier to work, holiday and further one’s studies
Perhaps countries in ASEAN could also treat each other more like buddies,
There might be better solidarity within ASEAN and its Member States
As the free movement of workers creates
A better climate of equality and protection
Against the various forms of discrimination.
A basic, common set of rules could be created to guide
The policies that ensure fundamental human rights
In summary, Singapore and ASEAN has a lot to learn
From the achievements of the EU which could be turned
Into important inspirations to give us insights
On how different countries can better show foresights
To collaborate and communicate with common vision
Rather than fight or withhold help to promote its selfish mission.
Convergence could be encourage on common policies
So that coordination is maximized and the fallacy
Of ‘success’ defined by a single country ability to achieve
At the expense of others can downturned and we can give
Proper credit to development that arises from mutuality,
Coordination and cooperation as its overriding policy.
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