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

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 predominately 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.

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 communications, India, Japan, and China are given special emphasis; however, Southeast Asian countries are lumped together in a tripolar world, more reflections on the efficaciousness of the regional groupings/regions/multi-lateral structural conceptions 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 and political crisis. vision from the Commission on Asia 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.

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

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