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The following is an outsider views, but it is from someone that has a lot of sympathy for the EU. This is because in the developing world it is ASEAN, of which as an Indonesian I am a member of, which is the only other relatively “successful” regional entity. And to a certain extent, namely on economic integration, we have been inspired by the EU.

Of course ASEAN is much more diverse than the EU and could not have the rules and the institutions that the EU has developed. And the “ASEAN way” has led to the very gradual process of cooperation that is comfortable to all, and is pursued in an informal and personal way through consensus building. Although as in the case of the EU, ASEAN was created for strategic reasons, its importance will be mainly in economic cooperation, which by 2015 will hopefully result in an ASEAN single market and production base.

The political and security parts will be a slower process of integration despite the adoption of the Charter. This is because the way decision-making through consensus has been instituted will not help in the other fields, as ASEAN is split on the issues of political development, democracy and human rights.

On the security community many members deemed it not urgent, as the conflict of the Buddhist Vihear Temple along the border of Thailand and Cambodia has shown, where ASEAN has been excluded to assist in finding a resolution. These developments are partly the result of the incorporation of the new members for only about a decade ago, who have different levels of economic development and also different ideologies.

EU is also mainly for economic cooperation, although the political part is important albeit becoming quite confusing for many, while in security terms and in international recognition it is not considered a big power.

The addition of many new members in the EU has brought some real confusion, and the people appear to be divided about the future of the entity. One part stresses that member countries should give some authority to the EU, although remaining sovereign, while others think it is already heading towards a federal state. That is why the Constitution has been rejected even by the French and the Dutch people, and an amended one was still rejected by Ireland.

However, the presence of such institutions as the EU Parliament and the Courts, as well as a functioning Council and the Commission, makes it possible for the EU to function without a constitution. Perhaps the mode of decision-making through consensus and the division of the votes are still a problem that is limiting the EU process. Due to the financial crisis and the economic downturn in the EU, the process of integration has become more constrained.

As relations between the leaders of the EU, especially between France and Germany, are not very close, decisions to overcoming the financial crisis have become more difficult to reach. However, the recent Berlin Summit in preparation of the G-20 in April has been rather positive.

The EU, like ASEAN, continues to be an elitist concept and has not become the concern of the general populace. The people feel that they are left out of the process.

Regional issues are debated in public and are a concern mostly among specialists. The people could not easily follow the debate. Thus, the Europhiles appear to be too optimistic when expecting the emergence of a federal status in the future, which is likely to be opposed by many.

Be that as it may, the EU is a unique institution. It no longer consists of fully sovereign states with all the rights and authority completely rested with the members, because on many things ( in the economic field and beyond) the authority has been given to the EU. This includes in the field of immigration (Schengen), the common currency (Euro) in monetary affairs, and some other legal issues.

There is now a kind of consolidation period going on in the EU. The financial crisis will make this a longer period than expected before. Despite this, the EU has become the identity of Europe.

The enlargement has made it more difficult to organize the EU, and the process of deepening of the cooperation is likely to be slowing down. The membership of Turkey will pose a special problem in the near future. The enlargement also made the EU more inward looking, as the unity of Europe becomes the most important objective. This is perhaps a natural development.

This could mean, that EU's role in global affairs and in relation to East Asia and ASEAN will not be intensive or important at this stage.