

**Report**

# **EU's Role in Regional Integration**

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**THE INSTITUTE OF STRATEGIC STUDIES,  
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The Institute of Strategic Studies, Islamabad (ISSI) organized an In-House Meeting on August 30, 2013 with Mr. Thomas Renard, Senior Research Fellow, Royal Institute for International Relations, Belgium on "*Trilateralism and its Role in Regional Integration*". The meeting was chaired by Dr. Ahmed Rashid Malik, Senior Research Fellow, ISS.

Welcoming the guest, Dr. Malik said that the world was rapidly moving towards regionalism, which has been successful in some regions like Southeast Asia, while it has failed to make an impact in other regions like South Asia. He also pointed to the lack of regional integration within North East Asia specifically from the perspective of conflict resolution.

Mr. Thomas Renard began his presentation by talking about EU's strategic approach in using multilateralism or bilateralism or a mix of both as tools in achieving its foreign policy goals. He stated that the EU has traditionally and historically promoted regionalism in its foreign relations. Mr. Renard was of the view that the EU thinks it is easier to promote regionalism through other regional bodies by being a good and effective example of regionalism. He opined that though it had taken the EU sixty years to integrate regionally, and so far, at the international level it was the most advanced regional body. Expanding on how the EU promotes regionalism, Mr. Renard said that the EU not only uses economic incentives to promote regionalism in other regional organizations, but also coercive measures like trade sanctions.

Talking about EU's foreign policy, Mr. Renard said that it focuses on taking advantage of its market and trade power to create leverage in areas where the EU is a bit weak like in the political and security field. In various agreements with regional organizations, the trade dimension has been used to negotiate political agreements. He also highlighted the fact that clauses on non-proliferation and human rights have been added to most of the EU agreements with other countries and regions to promote the ideals that the EU believes in.

Mr. Renard stated that the EU believes that promoting regional integration would help shape a global order where there would be less powerful countries and more powerful organizations. The EU has strongly supported the notion of 'Effective Multilateralism' as defined in the European Security Strategy (ESS) of 2003. Defining 'Effective Multilateralism', Mr. Renard said that the concept of

Effective Multilateralism encompassed universal and legally binding multilateralism, which relates to the United Nations system to counter challenges, as well as protect interests of the states and regions. The ESS was drafted in the aftermath of attack on Iraq in 2003 where the EU wanted to show that it was not only the US, but the EU as well that could have provided for an alternative way to the US action in Iraq.

Mr. Renard highlighted that the EU as a regional organization was vying for status and full-membership in various multilateral organizations, which is not an easy task. It is a dilemma for the EU as it thinks it should have membership in multilateral organizations but at the same time other regional organizations would also want to have that status. EU does not want to be equated with other regional organizations because it is more advanced in regionalism. Nevertheless other regional organizations have also applied for full membership status like the EU in various international multilateral organizations. The EU does not want to be put in the same basket as other regional organizations as it is unique and successful not only economically but also politically in international politics.

Talking about bilateralism in EU foreign policy, Mr. Renard pointed out that bilateralism was also defined in the European Security Strategy as an important element in EU foreign policy. He explained that today, multilateralism was in a gridlock and no more an effective method to deal with the new challenges facing the world. Even regionalism is showing signs of a slowdown internationally. On the other hand, bilateralism is on the rise globally. He also elaborated that encouraging bilateralism does not imply that the EU does not encourage regional cooperation. Infact, most of EU's bilateral agreements were fully compatible with global multilateral political and economic agreements. Giving an example of South America where Mercosur is a regional organization, Mr. Renard said that the EU was in the midst of trade negotiations, which were gridlocked because of internal competition within the Mercosur, though the EU could sideline the negotiations with Mercosur by initiating trade negotiations bilaterally with Brazil. But there is opposition within the EU to having bilateral negotiations with Brazil because that country is committed to Mercosur. So the EU was trying to rebalance its foreign policy act between regionalism and bilateralism.

Mr. Renard was of the view that rising powers like the EU wanted more clout to influence the world order and that regional and multilateral organizations are challenged and not the concept of regionalism and multilateralism itself.

Giving his assessment on foreign policy, Mr. Renards said that there may be three different future scenarios vis-à-vis EU foreign policy. It may either be multilateral, bilateral or a mix of both. This will depend on the way the EU would deal with various regions in the world. In Africa, the EU was involved at various dimensions whether it is through South African Development Community (SADC), Middle East and North Africa (MENA), African Union (AU) and of course enhancing bilateral relations with individual countries to support regionalism and improve relations. In case of South Asia, SAARC was a regional organization that was gridlocked and bilateralism has been used with India and Pakistan and it seems like the only approach in South Asia for successful EU policy in the region.

In other scenarios, bilateralism was used by the EU to strengthen multilateralism and regionalism. For example, in case of UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), side programs have been used by the EU with various countries bilaterally to bring them closer to EU's position in multilateral agreements and organizations by developing dialogues. In case of the UNFCCC, bilateralism is providing partnership for effective multilateralism towards a common position on climate change.

The discussion session revolved around EU's foreign policy approaches. Commenting on the question that the EU was seen as a trade block and not as a strategic power in international politics, Mr. Renard said that historically the EU was integrated through commodities (coal and steel). It was able to cooperate in defense and security under the European Security and Defense Policy (ESDP) in the 1990's which has been modified to Common Security and Defense Policy (CSDP). But security and foreign policy were new fields for the EU and though the EU has a non-proliferation and anti-terrorism policy, but it still has deficiencies and is not yet a global strategic actor in matters of international politics and defense.

On the question of EU's role with regards to conflict resolution on Syria, Mr. Renard opined that the EU was a young actor when it comes to conflict resolution. The Treaty of Lisbon had integrated European external relations under a single Action Service, which deals with Defense, Diplomacy and Development i.e. the three D's. In case of Syria, France and the UK want to intervene and Germany is opposed to it. So at the end of the day, the EU has to take a common position on conflict areas and as a result trade sanctions were imposed on Syria.

Mr. Renard agreed that there was divergence and difference of opinion within the EU regarding aspects of relations with developing countries and these divergences on various internal and external issues does limit the role of the EU internationally in making it an effective and strategic partner.

The EU is a very important block for Pakistan not only because it is Pakistan's biggest trading partner, but expectations from the EU are also high to play an effective role in enhancing regionalism in the SAARC region. Bilaterally, EU and Pakistan have a strategic dialogue, but the pace of this dialogue needs to accelerate and there is a need to work towards a Free Trade Agreement and also negotiate for the GSP Plus.

In conclusion, the chair thanked Mr. Thomas Renard for an insightful and comprehensive discussion.

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