

**RSOG-ASEF Seminar:**  
**“Mutual Perceptions of Asia and the EU in a Changing Global  
Environment - The view from Malaysia”**

**With**

Prof Martin Holland  
Director, National Centre for Research on Europe (NCRE),  
University of Canterbury

**And**

Mr Ronan Lenihan  
Project Executive, Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

**When** : 30 November 2012  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Who** : Prof. Martin Holland & Mr. Ronan Lenihan

**About The Seminar**

The seminar discussed the results of the “EU through the Eyes of Asia” & “Asia in the Eyes of Europe” research projects, presented by Prof Martin Holland (NCRE) and Ronan Lenihan (ASEF). The seminar gave an understanding of how the EU is perceived by a wide-section of civil society across the Asia Pacific, providing insights into the importance of the EU for its external partners. The seminar was timely as Malaysia and the EU are deep into Free Trade Agreement negotiations with the EU sovereign debt crisis continue to linger on.

**Target Audience**

Senior management in public ministries and departments, particularly from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of International Trade and Industry and Institute of

Diplomacy and Foreign Relations Malaysia; Diplomatic Corps, interested academicians and private sector participants.

## Summary

Prof Martin Holland began by giving a background of the contemporary study “The EU through the Eyes of Asia”, which examines media, public and opinion leaders perception of the “EU” in 10 countries across Asia including Malaysia. He emphasised that about 40 young researchers were specifically trained to collect the research data over a span of 2 years. In total, the team managed to gather 7967 news items – focused on both English and non-English media, 1000 on-line public respondents and completed 346 face-to-face interview.

Generally speaking, the EU was almost exclusively covered by the press compare to TV. In Malaysia EU received most coverage by *The Edge Financial Daily*, and trivially covered by other press such as *The Star*, *Utusan* and *Buletin Utama*. The main concern was that EU was significantly less covered by Malaysian media, in comparison to China and the United States of America (USA).

According to Prof Martin, the prolonged EU debt crisis effectively revert the general perception of EU as a leading international actor, where Asia-Pacific country generally has neutral view regarding EU’s action. This was not helped by the confusion state of EU in regards to its leader – Angela Merkel, the Chancellor of Germany, had more media appearances compare to the combined appearances of van Rompuy, President of European Council and Barroso, President of the European Commission.

Similarly, the Asia-Pacific’s public and elite population generally had positive perception of towards EU, with the exception of Australia, New Zealand and China. Prof Martin reasoned that both countries were antagonistic towards EU mainly due to EU’s Common Agriculture Policy which often viewed as anti-development, although the real concern was China’s negative perception on EU – highest among the Asia-Pacific countries.

Next, Mr Ronan Lenihan resumed the presentation on “Asia in the Eyes of Europe”, which typically constitutes the image of “a rising giant”. Using the similar methodology in the “EU through the Eyes of Asia” project, the study over a period of 3 months concluded that the Asia was reported twice as much by the French media; compare to the 7 other selected European countries. He emphasised that compare to Asia who depended mainly on non-local correspondents for news of EU; the news of Asia in EU were mainly sourced from its local newswires.

While the news of Asia was overly neutral, it continues to revolve around the image of poverty, conflict and disaster juxtaposed with growth, infrastructure and development. Malaysia was featured in a low 3.3% of articles and was viewed to have little importance as the ASEAN as a whole. Similar to the EU’s image dilemma, EU’s interest focus mainly on major economy power house like China, Japan and India. The media coverage and

resources were hence focused towards “monitoring the centres of power”, as the European are aware of the rising importance of Asia as a whole.

In response, Ms Eszter Nemeth, EU Head of Political, Press and Information to Malaysia stressed that despite having slightly less favourable perceptions, the EU is committed to play bigger role in Asia. In particular, EU will continue to pursue free trade negotiation with Malaysia, and look forward to improve their relationship with Asia having neglected it for the past years.

### **Questions and Issues Raised:**

- 1 The EU’s application of social media to maintain more positive perception among young people.
- 2 Finland’s experience of the he strong controlling culture of Malaysian authority, limiting even festival and/or cultural event.
- 3 Justification of including developed country like Australia and New Zealand in the study.
- 4 Speaker’s opinion of which Asian and European country that is most favourable for investment purposes.
- 5 To what extend the lack of engagement or influence on Asia contributing to EU’s current financial crisis.
- 6 Justification on using studying media when media itself plays a major role in framing the public perspective.

### **About the Speaker**

Prof Martin Holland has been a member of Canterbury's academic staff since 1984. During that time he has developed European Studies, first as a member of the Political Sciences Department and since 2000 as Director of the National Centre for Research on Europe. In 2004, the NCRE was designated a Jean Monnet Centre of Excellence by the EU's Directorate-General for Education and Culture. Notable fellowships awarded include:

- Jean Monnet Fellow, European University Institute, 1987;
- Alexander von Humboldt Fellow, Freiburg, 1992-4;
- Rockefeller Bellagio Fellow, 2000;
- Jean Monnet Chair of European Integration and International Relations, 2002-6.

Professor Holland is the author of some thirteen books, the most recent of which include *The European Union and the Third World* (Palgrave, 2002) and *The Common Foreign and Security Policy: The First Decade* (Continuum, 2003). He has served as an EU election observer (in South Africa, 1994), advised on a range of EU policy areas and since 2001 has been a Jean Monnet Chair of European Integration and International Relations. He was appointed as the NCRE founding professor in 2002, and is currently the vice-president of the Asia-Pacific EU Studies Association.

Mr Ronan Lenihan joined ASEF in 2008 and has since coordinated the “EU Through the Eyes of Asia” research project, and its new mirror project, “Asia in the Eyes of Europe”. He also works on ASEF activities focusing on regional economic integration, developing research focusing on foresight strategies for regional financial integration mechanisms in Asia and Europe.

He graduated from Dublin City University, with a Bachelor of Arts in Communication Studies in 2006 and following this completed his MA in Globalisation and International Relations at the Centre for International Studies at Dublin City University in 2007. Prior to joining ASEF, he worked for Rabobank International in Dublin.

## **Contact**

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