

Transnational Regionalism and Institutional Cultures: Comparing the EU and ASEAN Models and their Implications for India's Indo-Pacific Engagement

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Abstract:

This paper examines transnational regionalism through a comparative analysis of the European Union and ASEAN, focusing on their distinct institutional cultures and norms of cooperation. It asks how differences in regional institutional design shape patterns of transnational engagement, and what these differences reveal about India's preferred mode of partnership-building in Southeast Asia within the broader Indo-Pacific context. Using a qualitative comparative approach, the study draws on institutional frameworks, policy documents, and scholarly literature to contrast the EU's densely institutionalized, rule-based, and supranational model with ASEAN's consensus-oriented, flexible, and sovereignty-sensitive regional culture. The EU exemplifies a highly formalized mode of transnational cooperation built on shared legal frameworks and sustained policy coordination, whereas ASEAN prioritizes dialogue, incrementalism, and non-interference, producing a more adaptive and less hierarchical form of regional order.

These contrasting institutional cultures generate different logics of transnational cooperation and different expectations about how regional relationships should be conducted. The paper's central argument is that India's engagement with Southeast Asia illustrates a deliberate preference for low-density, flexible transnational regionalism. Rather than seeking deep institutional integration, India advances connectivity initiatives, maritime dialogue, trade linkages, and people-to-people partnerships while consistently affirming ASEAN centrality. The EU offers insights into institutional continuity and long-term policy coordination, yet ASEAN's sovereignty-conscious and process-oriented institutional culture remains more compatible with India's approach to regional order. By situating the EU and ASEAN within a comparative framework of transnational regionalism, the paper contributes to discussions on institutional cultures, norms of cooperation, and the diverse pathways through which regional orders are constructed. It shows that effective transnational partnerships depend less on replicating any single model and more on aligning with the prevailing institutional culture and normative expectations of the region.

Keywords:

Transnational regionalism, Institutional cultures, European Union, ASEAN, Indo-Pacific.