

Jean Monnet Lecture Series on EU-Asia Connectivity

EU-Asia Connectivity: Concepts, Contexts and Contestations

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Covid-19, China and Changes in the Global Economy

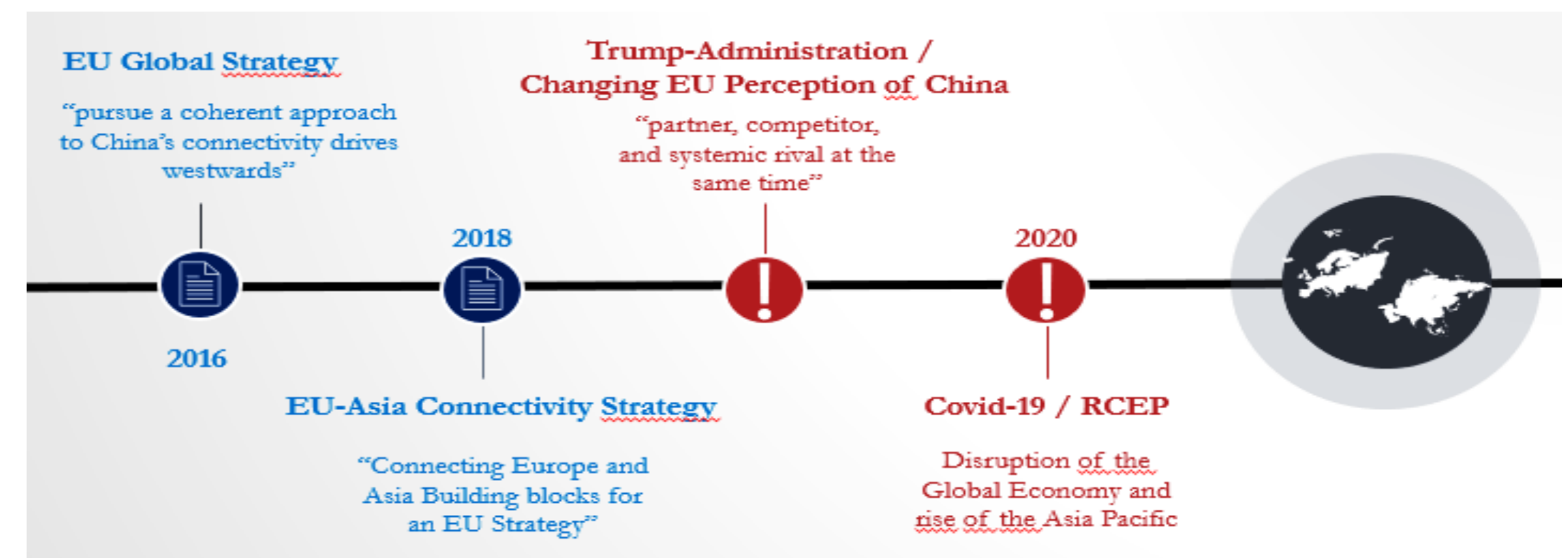
A Changing Strategic Context



Cyberdiplomacy

What the Internet is and how it should be governed

"China-ASEAN digital port to promote digital connectivity and build a digital silk road"
(Xi Jinping; 27.11.2020)

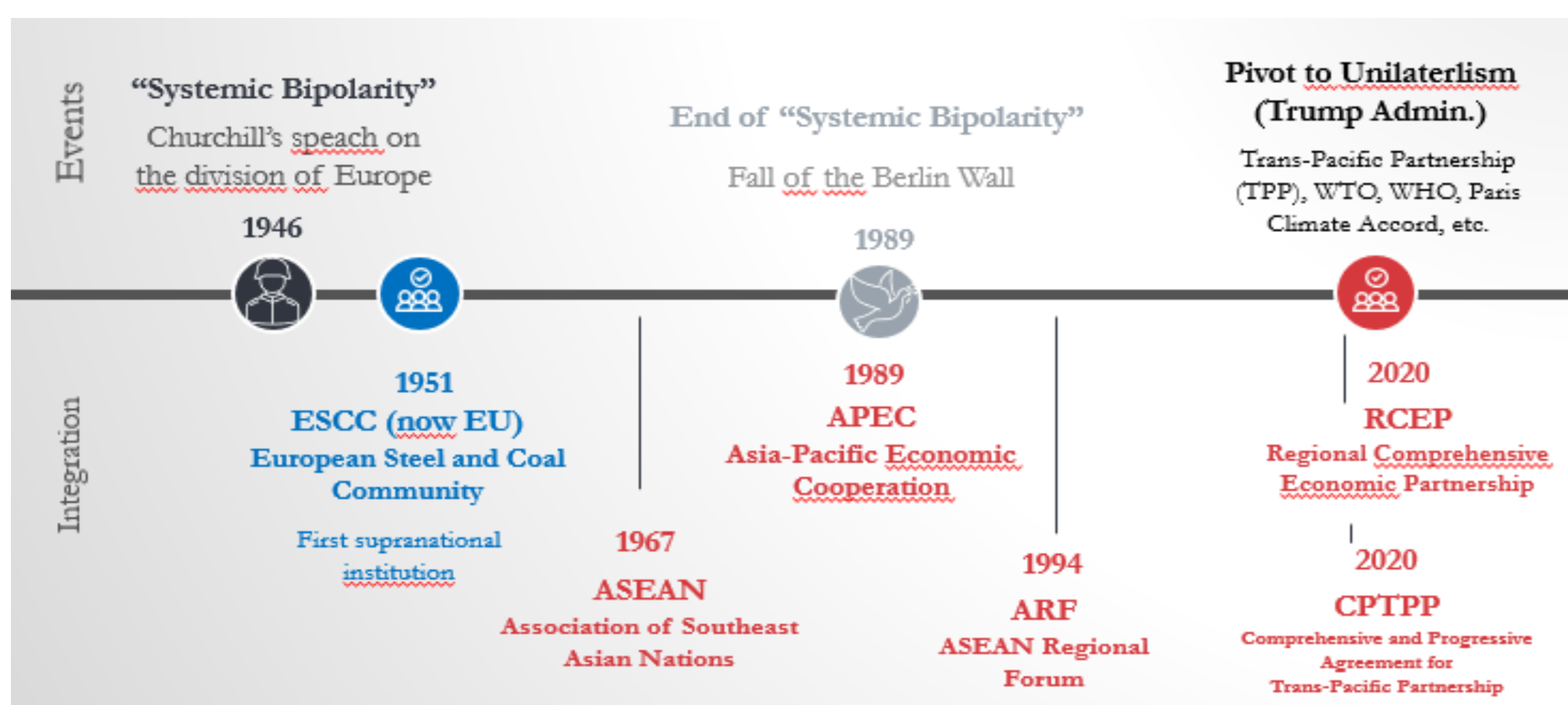


- In September 2018 Brussels presented the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy "Connecting Europe and Asia Building blocks for an EU Strategy", however, the international context has changed rather dramatically.

- The perception of China as a "rival" constitutes a major change in EU-China relations. And the contestations between the EU and its now 27 Member States and the People's Republic of China are increasing in number and scope.
- The more Europe and the United States are coordinating and cooperating vis-à-vis China probably the better. But for the EU to play a role according to its interests and norms more agency is needed.

Regional Integration in Europe and Asia Compared

Concepts of Connectivity in Europe and Asia



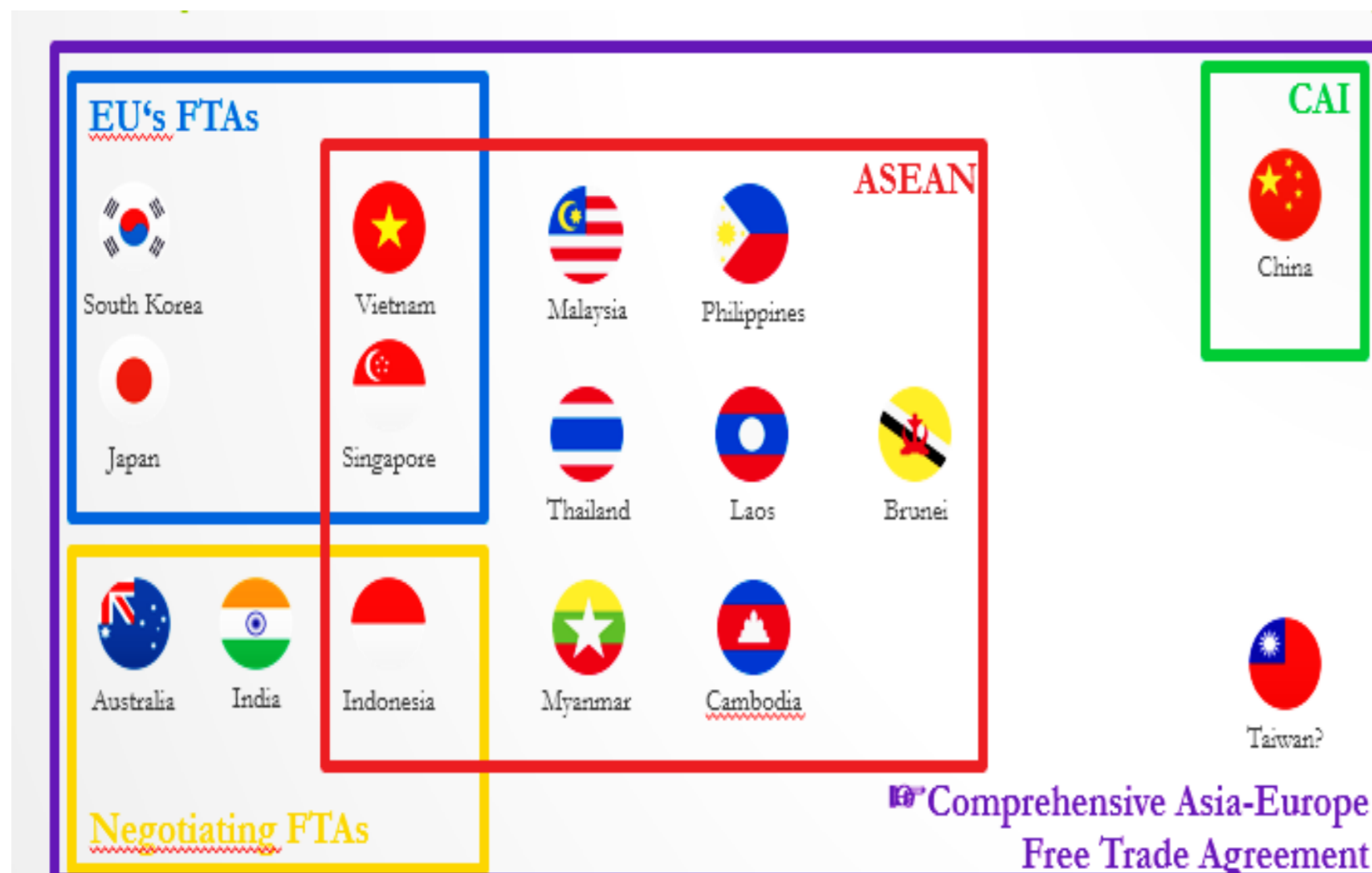
- Connectivity can be regarded as a very European concept. It is thus only natural for the EU to become a more proactive driver, a leader, of connectivity, not only in the European intraregional context, but also in the interregional context.

- The element of a rules based approach makes the European definition of connectivity (the European Way) most distinct from others and sets it apart with a normative-institutional dimension of connectivity.

Connectivity and Challenges to the EU's Role in Asia

The Way Forward: Re-multilateralization and Multilateral Connectivity

- The elevation of the EU-ASEAN relationship to a Strategic Partnership is of high symbolic meaning, but it will need to be backed up by what is often called tangible or concrete results. The institutional framework to embed EU-ASEAN relations and by extension a future EU-ASEAN FTA could be the Asia-Europe Meeting process.



- In the new context of a post-pandemic environment the EU might consider providing a new rationale for EU-Asia relations by proposing a strategic vector in the form of a major political project: to jointly work towards a future Comprehensive Asia-Europe Free Trade Agreement.
- Europe would present a new narrative, a new story of its role in EU-Asia relations, namely that of a co-leader in multilateral connectivity as opposed to bilateral connectivity. Such an overall policy approach should send a strong signal to China and Xi Jinping's signature foreign policy project, i.e. the Belt and Road Initiative.
- A window of opportunity has opened up for the EU to increase its role in Asia, the Pacific and the Indo-Pacific. If actors in the Asia-Pacific proactively engage in multilateral regional integration as in the cases of RCEP and the CPTPP then the EU is a natural partner.