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ABSTRACT OF PRESENTATION

The EU through the Eyes of Thai Elites

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The overall assessment interviews of the Thai elites reveals that the European Union (EU)'s involvement with political and civil society elites is very limited, whilst businesses show a greater tendency to have an intimate involvement with the EU, both as a source and destination market. Almost all the elites interviewed saw the EU as a great power, especially in terms of economic power, either rivalling or surpassing the United States in terms of global economic power. The United States is still seen as the greater international political power, however, there is some indication that without the EU's support, some international initiatives cannot succeed, making the EU a crucial secondary international actor.

The EU features prominently in Thai foreign relations. The importance of the EU, is also due to prominent member states with long historical ties with Thailand, such as the United Kingdom, France and Germany, and other specific trading partners, rather than the EU by itself. Interview results suggest that the atmosphere of Thai-EU relations as either stable, or potentially improving. Trade remains the predominant issue in Thai-EU relations and no change has been noticed. Although further development of trade remains a prominent issue, the developments of other linkages are also deemed as important for the future, such as cultural collaboration, and public and developmental policy co-operation

Although there are a number of EU's activities and services that are initiated by the European Commission (EC) Delegation office in Bangkok, some of these roles are overshadowed by the activities of individual member states with operating embassies in Thailand.

Economically speaking, both positive and negative views on trade opportunities of an enlarged EU are equally shared. Also true is a mixed opinion on the status of the euro in the international market, whereby the euro may or may not replace the US dollar as the eminent international currency for some time to come.

In terms of knowledge of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) process, many elites admitted that they knew little if anything about it. A significant number of elites were unaware of the ASEM 6 Summit in Helsinki, Finland, in September 2006.

For Thai elites, newspapers and the Internet are the major source for information on the EU. Television news seems to come second. Most elites claim to have contacts within Europe through friends and family, as well as through extensive travel to the region.