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# EU not high on Singaporeans' radar

New book on the group's image in Asia reports this, and other findings

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THE average Singaporean does not attach much importance to ties with the European Union (EU) even though it is Singapore's second-largest trading partner after Malaysia.

The group of 27 countries – including Britain, France and Germany – is viewed here chiefly as an economic bloc and less as a political power.

Those are some of the findings of a new book on the EU's image in Asia, launched yesterday by the Asia-Europe Foundation with help from the European Studies Programme in the National University of Singapore (NUS).

To put together the book, *The EU Through The Eyes Of Asia*,

researchers looked at Asian media representations of the group in 2006. They also interviewed policymakers, business leaders and media editors in five Asian countries, including Singapore. China, Japan, South Korea and Thailand were the other countries studied.

A survey of 400 Singaporeans saw the EU ranked sixth on a list of important partners for Singapore – behind China, the United States, Asia, Japan and India.

While the EU and Asean are both major regional groupings, only 1 per cent of Singaporean respondents saw the EU as a model for Asean.

Reflecting on the findings here, NUS European Studies academic convenor Barnard Turner noted that the EU “is often considered a distant ‘other’”. The US had the greatest influence and clout in global relations, he noted, while in global trade it was Asia, particularly China.

In comparison, survey respondents in China ranked the EU No. 2 on their list of key partner countries, second only to the

US. They tended to see the EU not just as a trade partner, but also one of several great powers in a multi-polar world.

One reason for the EU's lack of visibility in Singapore could be the legacy of colonialism, the survey suggested.

Prof Turner quoted an unnamed interviewee who said “there is an aversion to Europe” among some Asians who associate it with “former colonial powers”.

However the president of the European Chamber of Commerce here, Mr Joachim Ihrcke, disagreed with the findings, saying Europe is “back on the radar screen” as far as the Singapore business community is concerned.

At a panel discussion at yesterday's book launch, he attributed this interest in the EU to Asean economies moving up the value chain and going into sectors like the manufacturing of cars and aircraft parts, and environmental sustainability, “in which Europe is a world leader”.

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